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**Labour market uncertainties for the young workforce in  
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formation and fertility**

Marie-Thérèse LETABLIER, Anne SALLES

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# Labour market uncertainties for the young workforce in France and Germany:

## Implications for family formation and fertility

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Contribution to the GUSTO project, Work Package 3: Individual pathways to flexibility and  
Sustainability in Europe

European 7<sup>th</sup> framework Programme

[www.gusto-project.eu](http://www.gusto-project.eu)

### Résumé

*Dans cette contribution à l'axe trois (trajectoires de flexibilité en Europe) du projet de recherche GUSTO, nous examinons les effets de la précarité à l'entrée dans la vie active sur la formation de la famille en Allemagne et en France. Comment les individus gèrent l'incertitude face à l'avenir engendrée par l'insécurité économique générée par la précarité de l'emploi dans la mise en œuvre de leurs projets de famille ? Dans quelle mesure la précarité de l'emploi à l'entrée dans la vie active contribue-t-elle à expliquer les différences de fécondité ? L'analyse s'appuie sur une enquête qualitative réalisée dans les deux pays auprès d'un échantillon de jeunes hommes et femmes âgés de 27 à 35 ans. L'étude met en évidence des différences dans les perceptions de la précarité, ainsi que des effets contrastés sur la décision d'avoir des enfants. Elle souligne des effets de genre plus marqués en Allemagne de l'ouest qu'en France ainsi qu'une défiance plus grande vis-à-vis de la capacité des politiques familiales à sécuriser les parcours de parentalité en Allemagne.*

### Abstract

*This contribution to the Gusto research project for the European 7<sup>th</sup> framework programme (Work Package 3: individual pathways to Flexibility and Sustainability) examines how employment uncertainty during the transition into the labour force differently impacts family formation in Germany and France. Based on a qualitative survey with young men and women in age of being parents, the paper explores how the individuals manage with uncertainty and economic insecurity to finalize their reproduction projects. The paper therefore contributes to an understanding of the contrasted fertility patterns in the two countries. It highlights variations in the perception of insecurity related in particular to differences in gender conventions and their related incidence on family patterns in the two countries. The paper also highlights the contrasted impact of trust in family policies, especially in their ability to secure individuals transitions.*

**Mots clés :** formation de la famille, décisions de fécondité, insécurité économique, incertitude sur le marché du travail, précarité.

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**Keywords:** family formation, fertility decisions, economic insecurity, labour market uncertainty, precariousness.

**JEL:** J01, J13, J16

## Introduction

European labour markets are characterized by increasing flexibilization of work both at work places and in the individual working lives. Besides high unemployment the rise of precarious forms of employment challenges the sustainability of the social security systems, especially the insurance based systems. Mainly based on contributions, financing of these systems depends on relatively stable employment biographies, while entitlements are dependent on employment status of the individuals. Moreover, high protection levels for labour markets insiders make it difficult for outsiders and newcomers to access to stable employment. Young people are particularly hit by the overall dynamic, although differently according to gender and skills. Whereas non-standard employment isn't necessarily involuntary, related uncertainties and insecurities might affect individual life course and family formation decisions.

Looking at France and Germany<sup>3</sup>, two continental welfare regimes historically rooted into the Bismarckian tradition of social insurance, a first explorative paper on labour market and job insecurities of young people in France and Germany was delivered by the Essen-Duisburg research team to the third seminar of the GUSTO Work package 3 in Paris (Klammer and Ahles, 2010). In this paper authors identified institutional similarities and differences regarding the labour market situation of young people in the reference countries. In this paper, we explore the implications of labour market uncertainties of the young workforce on family formation and beyond on fertility variations between the two countries.

While low fertility has become a major challenge in most European countries, France and Germany offer contrasted fertility patterns. Although with two children on average per woman, fertility in France is one of the highest in Europe, with less than 1, 4 children per woman Germany displays one of the lowest fertility level. Various explanations have been given to the fertility variations across countries, both structural and cultural, but little research has explored the implications of job uncertainty on family formation of the young workforce. In this second part of the Essen-Duisburg contribution, we explore how growing labour market uncertainties of younger people at the age of reproductive decisions impact on their family behaviour in two institutional and policy contexts.

The paper draws on relevant labour market and demographic empirical data. It also relies on an evaluation of the relevant literature and research outcomes on labour market uncertainties' implications on family formation. It is completed by a specific analysis of the responses to a qualitative survey on fertility decisions carried out for the Reproductive Decisions Research Project – REPRO<sup>4</sup>, using the same questionnaire. A similar sample of interviewees was selected in the two countries: men and women aged between 27 and 34, partnered or not, with and without children, living in two cities of the same size, and with a similar level of education (see annexe 2 for a description of the qualitative survey).

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<sup>3</sup> Only West Germany will be examined in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> *The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme under award n° 217173 (REPRO).*

Labour market uncertainties will be mainly related to unemployment, employment instability, poor quality of jobs, and job precariousness. All these situations lead to effective or perceived economic insecurity, therefore limiting the reproductive decisions. The perception of economic insecurity however highly varies according to gender and class. It also varies from one country to another depending on the institutional and policy context.

Assessing what are the implications of youth labour market uncertainties on fertility decisions requires having a gender approach of the question. Are implications of labour market uncertainties similar for men and women? Is the gender effect similar in the two countries? We hypothesize that difference in the gender implications depends on the strength of the male breadwinner family model that shape the place of men and women in the society. Therefore, the feeling of insecurity may be stronger for men than for women in a context of strong male breadwinner in which the economic security of men is perceived as more important for the household income security than the income security of women who are supposed to be more dependent of the male income. So, the implications of labour market uncertainties will be compared in the light of the gender contract in the two countries. With respect to family formation issue, it is necessary to consider the interactions between the members of the couple and not only the labour market situation of each member. Precarious or uncertain labour market situation may refer to the employment situation of one of the members of the couple, but may not mean that the couple lives in an economic insecurity. For instance, a woman with a mini-job in Germany can be viewed as being individually in a precarious situation, but being rather secure from a household perspective if her partner has a “good” job situation.

The first section examines what are the labour market uncertainties and specific labour market problems encountered by young people<sup>5</sup> in France and Germany emphasizing three dimensions: the overall economic context, unemployment and temporary labour contracts. Developments in this section mainly draws on Klammer and Ahles’ paper for the GUSTO seminar in 2010 (Klammer and Ahles, 2010). The second section explores what are the overall trends in fertility and family formation in France and Germany before moving more specifically to family formation patterns and fertility behaviour of young people in the 3rd section. The 4<sup>th</sup> section examines how family policies and welfare system regulations concur to secure young people who are concerned by uncertain labour market situation. Drawing from the qualitative interviews the focus will be in particular on the perception of family and employment policies in the two countries. It examines how policies can enhance the security feeling for precarious young men and women. The last section explores the implications of relevant social norms and values on fertility issues, gender relations and work and family conflicting identities in the reference countries.

## **I-Labour market uncertainties among Young people in France and West Germany**

In 2009, very few young people aged 15-24 were in the labour force in Germany (52.0%); the activity rate was slightly higher for young men (54.4%) than for young women (49.6%). Activity rates for this cohort were even lower in France (40.6%, and respectively 43.7% and 37.4% for men and women).

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<sup>5</sup> Young people are defined here as people aged between 16 (end of compulsory school in France) and 35 years, taking account of the fact that the mean age at childbearing is now around 30 years in France (Pison, 2010). Although the age at childbirth varies considerably according to women’s level of education, we assume that 35 years should be the age limit of youth with respect to the issues examined in this paper. We will however distinguish 16-25 and 26-35 age groups, since the group of 16-25 displays specific fertility behaviour and specific issues (early pregnancies and so on ... with particular interactions with labour force participation). But for a large majority of the 16-25, fertility prospects are far.

These figures reflect however variations by age group in the two countries (Table 1). Activity rates are relatively low for the 15-19, though slightly higher in Germany than in France.

**Table 1: Labour force participation rates by gender and age group, 2009**

	15-19		20-24		25-29		30-34	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>France</b>	19.1	13.5	67.8	59.5	93.1	82.3	96.2	81.4
<b>Germany</b>	34.7	28.3	74.3	67.9	87.0	77.4	94.5	78.0

Source: OECD

In the two countries, activity rates are higher for youth people aged 25-29 but with large variations according to gender and level of education. With a high level of education, around 90% of men and women in the two countries are in the labour force (table 1). But with a low level of education, only 46.4% of women in Germany and 62.4% in France are in the labour force, compared to 88.5% and 90.6% of men (Table2). The gender gap is larger for low-educated young people in Germany than in France, but it is the reverse for medium-educated young people. For high-educated young people 25-29, the gap is reduced in the two countries (around 5 percentage points). The gender gap for low-educated young people in Germany is the highest in EU member states whereas it is closer to the average in France (Eurostat, 2009).

**Table 2: activity rates of young people (25-29) by gender and educational level, 2007 (%)**

	Women			men			Gender gap		
Level of education	low	medium	high	low	medium	high	Low	Medium	High
<b>France</b>	62.4	80.6	88.3	90.6	95.9	93.8	28.2	15.3	5.5
<b>Germany</b>	46.4	79.9	90.0	88.5	83.3	95.3	42.1	3.4	5.3

Source: Eurostat, 2009 in Klammer and Ahles, 2010: p. 9.

### ***1. Young people are more affected by unemployment than other age groups***

The first difficulty encountered by young people is to find a job after leaving school. In 2009, one third of the age group 15-19 years was unemployed in France and almost 30% of the 20-24 age group. Between the ages of 25 and 29, one on four people is still unemployed compared to unemployment rates lower than 10% for the age groups older than 35 years. Youth unemployment is particularly sensitive to the economic context.

Youth unemployment has been a structural problem for the French labour market for decades. This is reflected in unemployment rates by sex and age group (Table 3). The table shows a large variation in the unemployment rates between France and Germany, especially in the youngest cohorts. For the 15-24 age cohorts, the unemployment rate was 23.3% in France (24.6% and 22.5% for men and women respectively) compared to 10.4% in Germany (11.9% and 8.9% for men and women respectively) where it was notably lower.

**Table 3: Unemployment rates by sex and age, 2009**

	15-19		20-24		25-29		30-34	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>France</b>	26.9	34.1	22.6	19.3	11.5	11.9	7.9	9.3
<b>Germany</b>	10.7	11.9	12.5	9.1	10.7	7.8	7.8	7.4

Source: OECD

While highly skilled workers are more likely than other categories to enter the labour market, school to work transitions of the low educated remain difficult in France, as shown by table 4. But since the mid-1990s unemployment rates for young people have tended to decrease, as is also the case in Germany (Klammer and Ahles, 2010).

Difficulties in finding a job are markedly greater for young people with a low or very low level of education. Unemployment rates decrease as the level of education increases. Young people tend however to be unemployed for shorter periods of time than older unemployed people (table 4). Differences in the vocational education system might explain the better performance of Germany in this respect.

The duration of unemployment also matters. Long-term unemployment can reduce career opportunities. As shown by Klammer and Ahles (2010), while overall youth unemployment has been declining, long-term unemployment for the 15-24 age groups has increased in Germany and France. In the two countries, the risk of becoming unemployed at an early age is relatively high in Germany and France (p. 11). In 2007, 24.4% of the 15-24 age group were in long-term unemployment (more than one year) in France compared to 32.1% in Germany. Long term unemployment increases the risk for young people to be trapped in precarious jobs.

**Table 4: Unemployment by sex and age group, France, 2009**

Unemployment definition)	(ILO	Men	Women	Total	
		(%)	(%)	Thousands	(%)
<b>Total</b>		8.9	9.4	2 577	9.1
<b>15-24</b>		24.6	22.5	641	23.7
<b>25-49</b>		7.6	8.8	1498	8.2
<b>50 and +</b>		5.9	6.2	438	6.1
<i>Unemployment &gt; one year</i>		35.6	35.3	913	35.4
<b>15-24</b>		28.2	24.1	170	26.5
<b>25-49</b>		33.7	35.1	516	34.4
<b>50 +</b>		53.7	49.4	226	51.6
<i>Unemployment &gt; 2 years</i>		16.6	16.0	420	16.3
<b>15-24</b>		8.9	7.8	55	8.5
<b>25-49</b>		15.6	15.8	235	15.7
<b>50+</b>		32.3	26.9	130	29.6

Field: Labour force 15 and +, Metropolitan France.

Source: Insee, Enquête emploi 2009.



## 2. Non-standard employment among the younger generations

Labour market uncertainty is also due to the high incidence of non-standard employment, that is temporary or short-term labour contracts and, to a certain extent, part-time work when it is imposed by the employer on the employee. The length of transitions from school to the labour market varies depending on the level of education and the age at leaving school. Transitions are characterised by various forms of risk, from unemployment to short-term labour contracts. Non-standard employment is sometimes viewed as work experience, a probation period before getting a standard labour contract, but in most cases it is linked to precariousness of living conditions and to economic insecurity, which is likely to have implications for family projects.

### Part-time employment

Part-time employment is deeply rooted in societal ideas about family and gender relationships. But part-time is not only linked to work-life balance issues. It may be imposed on employees because of companies' work organisation. And in recent decades, part-time work has also been associated with employment programmes in the context of activation policies. Most of subsidized jobs aimed at facilitating the transitions of young people into the labour market are part-time jobs. Part-time work has played a crucial role at different stages of education and training, especially in Germany. By contrast, part-time work in France is not viewed as a distinct form of employment.

Part-time employment is more common in Germany than in France, representing respectively 21.9 % and 13.3% of total employment in 2009 (OECD, Employment Outlook 2009). The breakdown of part-time employment by age and sex shows that this form of employment does not have the same incidence for men and women. Whatever the age group, part-time work is more common for women than for men in the two countries. But it may not have the same meaning for each age group: before the age of 30 years, the gender gap is higher in France than in Germany, partly due to the higher part-time employment rates for men in Germany (Table 5).

Although for men part-time employment tends to decrease with age in Germany, it tends to increase for women until the age of 25 years, after first being low, suggesting that part-time work is becoming a mean of reconciling work and care. In France part-time work is also a women's issue but is notably more common for young women at the age of entry into the labour force. In fact, involuntary part-time is markedly higher for young women fewer than 25 in France compared to men and also for both men and women in Germany.

**Table 5: Part-time work by sex and age group, France and Germany, 2009** (% of total employment)

	15-19		20-24		25-29		30-34	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
<b>France</b>	8.3	30.8	9.8	26.1	4.0	15.8	4.2	20.0
<b>Germany</b>	17.1	25.0	13.5	22.1	11.7	24.4	6.4	32.2

Source: OECD (<http://oecd.org>)

The breakdown of part-time employment by sex and age group suggests that part-time work can have different meanings according to economic, institutional and cultural contexts. Indeed reasons for part-time employment differ in the two countries. The amount of involuntary part-time in France is one of the highest in Europe, contrasting with Germany where part-time work is more often linked to education and training. Among reasons for working part-time, education and training is given by 60.4% of the 15-24 in Germany compared to 18.1% in France. By contrast, 25.7% in Germany say

that they could not find a fulltime job compared to 58.1% in France. Respectively 13.9% and 23.8% give other reasons for working part-time without any specification (Klammer and Ahles, 2010). This is confirmed by French data sources showing that young people are more often under employed<sup>6</sup> than other age groups: in 2009, 10.1% of the 15-24 were under-employed compared to 5.3% in the 25-49 age group and 4.8% in the 50 and above age group. This proportion is very sensitive to the overall economic situation (Mansuy and Nouël de la Buzonnière, 2011).

Part-time work is more common for adult women (25-49) in Germany where 47% of women are concerned compared to 29% of same age group of women in France. This confirms the strong relation between part-time work and family responsibilities in Germany whereas this relation is weaker in France. However, the so-called “mini jobs” in Germany are characterized by high social insecurity (see 2.3 in Klammer and Ahles, 2010), but this does not seem to apply for young people.

### Fixed-term labour contracts

In the two countries, fixed-term contracts are more common among young people than older age groups. In 2009, according to OECD data, almost 50% in the 15-24 age group in France and 59% in Germany had fix term contracts whereas the proportion decreases to 7.9% and 8.8% respectively for the 25-54 (table 6).

**Table 6: Fixed-term contracts by age group, France and Germany** (% of CDD in total employment)

	2006		2007		2008		2009	
	15-24	25-54	15-24	25-54	15-24	25-54	15-24	25-54
<b>France</b>	49.3	9.3	51.3	9.0	50.9	8.8	49.5	7.9
<b>Germany</b>	59.2	8.9	59.2	8.9	58.1	9.1	59.1	8.8

Source: OECD (<http://oecd.org>)

The large proportion of fix-term contracts among young people in Germany can be explained by the German vocational education system. In fact, all apprentices are employed on a fix-term contract. Although temporary contracts are not all precarious, they can cause uncertainty with regard to living conditions, and especially when making plans for the future and notably for family formation. They contribute to insecure trajectories. They are in fact one of the main characteristics of transitions from school to stable employment.

In France, temporary agency work is more widespread among low skilled male workers for whom it is often a pathway into the labour market whereas temporary work is still considered as marginal in Germany in spite of the recent reforms attempting to change its image.

<sup>6</sup> Individuals are counted as under-employed if they work part-time and state in the labour force survey that they would like to work longer hours and are available do so. Part-time work is being imposed on them for various reasons that are related to the work organization in the company or to variations in the work load.

### ***3. Transitions from education to work***<sup>7</sup>

Young people moving from education to work are in a particular vulnerable situation, and this is especially the case for the least qualified who experience the greatest difficulties in finding a stable job (Employment in Europe, 2010, chap. 3).

The median age for the first regular job is about 17- 18 in France<sup>8</sup>. One year after leaving education, a significant proportion of young people are not in employment in France: about 30% are employed compared to more than 60% in Germany (Employment in Europe, 2010: chart 18 p. 129). Five years after leaving initial education, about 70% are in employment in the two countries. Then youth employment rates gradually converge to reach those of the adult population. Although employment rates are very similar for men and women one year after leaving education, a gender gap progressively emerges. Ten years after completing school the employment gender gap is about ten points in the two countries (Employment in Europe, 2010, chart 10, p. 129). The gender gap is particularly large for young people with a low educational level. Better educated young people experience a faster transition to employment.

In some countries, temporary contracts represent an effective stepping stone to permanent job, and the wage penalty associated with their use at the beginning of a career tends to be transitory. This is the case in countries like Germany where the apprenticeship system is well established. But in other countries, temporary workers may be trapped in precarious work, as in France for instance, where a large number of young people move for years between temporary jobs and unemployment, thereby limiting their career prospects. A precarious start in adult life is likely to exacerbate perceived insecurity, thereby impacting on an individual's behavior (Employment in Europe, 2010: p 141: chart 29). Some young people may defer the age of emancipation from their parents, or family formation and childbearing decisions.

Transitions from temporary to permanent employment vary by sex, age group and education level. With regard to gender, in France as in most European countries, men have a better chance of moving to a permanent job than women, although the overall opportunities are limited.<sup>9</sup> Low conversion rates of temporary into permanent jobs may affect wage formation and pay levels. Temporary contracts often involve a wage penalty that may impact on the economic security of young people at the age of family formation.

Finally, young people encounter similar difficulties in the two countries in entering in the labour market. School to work transitions are longer than before, therefore postponing the age of emancipation from parental support in most European countries. Young people are more exposed to unemployment than older people. They are also more likely to be on temporary jobs with short-term labour contracts, therefore creating uncertainty for the future. They are also on the front line regarding the impact of economic slowdown. However the insecurity risk resulting from the increasing labour market uncertainties for young people is higher for low qualified and low educated people than for the others.

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<sup>7</sup> See Annexe 3 for more information on transitions in France.

<sup>8</sup> Information from the EU SILC data (*Employment in Europe*, 2010: p. 129). OECD provides a comparative analysis of school-to-work transitions based on both cross-national and longitudinal data. The OECD has also recently conducted a comparative study, Jobs for Youth, aimed at providing an assessment of youth labour market outcomes and policies facilitating their integration into the labour market.

<sup>9</sup> No data for Germany in *Employment in Europe*, 2010.

However, there are some differences between France and Germany: Young people are more often participating in the labour market in Germany than in France where participation begins more often by a period of unemployment. Both countries however face similar difficulties with young low educated people who have particular difficulties in finding a job. Although the dual German system mixing education and work is becoming less competitive, it remains an example to be followed for France. By contrast the German government plans to develop the high education system in order to increase the number of high educated people while the French government attempts to restructure the French system. Finally, French and German young people display different relationship with the labour market. But the transition phase to secure employment is however hard to capture through the only age variable. This transition step is however crucial with regard to the implications on family behaviour, values and self-esteem (CAS, 2007).

Labour market uncertainty does not however result automatically in economic insecurity, notably because it does not have the same impact whether you are a man or a woman, and depending on the more or less strength of the male breadwinner regime. In strong male breadwinner regimes, the male insecurity is more at risk than female insecurity, especially if they can rely on their partner. In moderate male breadwinner regimes the gender gap regarding the insecurity feeling may be lower since security is viewed as been as prominent for men and women.

So, labour market uncertainties may not be perceived similarly by men and women, especially with regard to family formation. In a context of a persistently strong male breadwinner model of the family, women's precariousness may not be perceived as a problem, especially if the partner has a stable permanent job and is more secure in his career prospects and confident about maintaining the household income. Therefore gendering transitions is a major issue for understanding the barriers to family formation.

## **II- Overall trends in Family formation and fertility in France and Germany**

In comparison with other European countries, the fertility level remains relatively high in France. With close to two children on average per woman, the total fertility rate is one of the highest in Europe (Pla and Beaumel, 2011). Family formation is no longer connected with marriage: more than 50% of births are out of wedlock. For many French couples, marriage is no longer the "passage obligé" to form a family, or to confirm the existence of a family unit (Prioux and Mazuy, 2009). In Germany, the proportion of births out of wedlock is lower, reaching 33% of births (25% in West Germany and 60% in East Germany) thereby indicating that marriage remains more important in west Germany than in France. The relatively high level of fertility in France may indicate that the desire for children is strong across the entire social stratum. Indeed, fertility intentions reach a higher level in France than in most other European countries, and especially than West Germany.

### ***1. Germany and France, two contrasted fertility patterns in Europe***

France and Germany display very different patterns of fertility. Although the average number of children per woman is currently 1.5 children on average in the EU27, the number is close to 2 in France and 1.4 in Germany (Chart 1). The average number of children was 2.02 for in France and 1.53 in Germany for the 1965 women's cohort.

The two curves on Chart 1 reflect parallel trends in fertility rates. In the two countries, fertility has been declining but the fertility rate started from a lower base in Germany than in France compared to

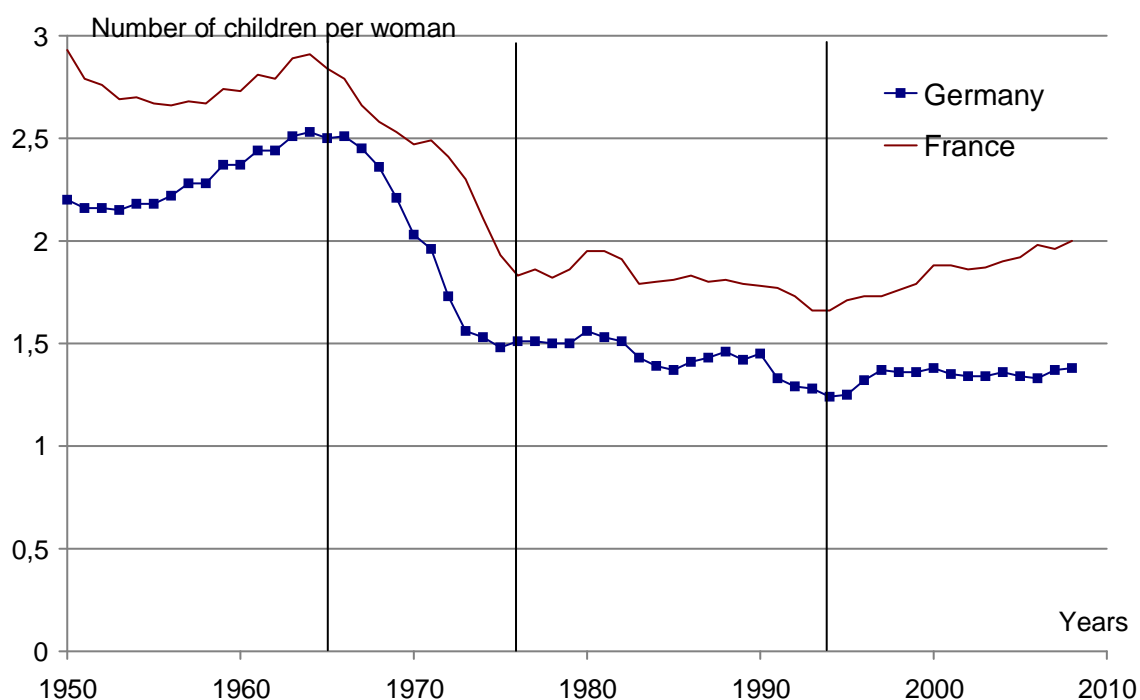
half a century ago. The gap has tended to widen over the past fifteen years. The decline has stopped in the two countries but remains at a flat level in Germany while it has been increasing constantly in France, reaching two children per women in 2010 (Pison, 2011). France now has one of the highest fertility rates in Europe whereas Germany has one of the lowest (Toulemon, 2011). This long term trend is also observed for generations (table 7).

**Table 7 : Trends in fertility by generations in Germany and France, and mean age at childbirth**

Generation	Total fertility rate					Mean age at maternity				
	1954-55	1959-60	1964-65	1969-70	1974-75	1954-55	1959-60	1964-65	1969-70	1974-75
Germany	1.66	1.66	1.56	1.49	1.51	26.4	27.1	28.1	29.0	29.3
France (met)	2.13	2.12	2.04	1.99	2.00	27.0	27.7	28.6	29.5	29.9

Sources : Eurostat (calculs : Prioux *et al.*, 2010: p. 461)

**Chart 1: Fertility trends in Germany and France, 1950-2010**



Note: Fertility rate (number of children per woman)

Source: L. Toulemon, 2011

## 2. Postponement of family formation in the two countries

The mean age at childbirth has been progressively postponed in the two countries as everywhere in Europe, now reaching 30 years in France and 29, 3 years in Germany<sup>10</sup> (table 8).

The postponement of childbirth is generally attributed to the time spent in the education system and to the length of transitions from education to work. However, the age at family formation differs according to the level of education and, consequently, according to social categories of the population. It is however worth noting that the level of fertility remains high in France despite the postponement of family formation; research has shown that the second or the third child comes relatively quickly after the first one in France. In fact, the postponement of the first birth results in an increase in the number of births between the ages of 35 and 39 and, to a lesser extent, to an increase in births after the age of 40. This major change in fertility behaviour is due to the fact that a certain number of conditions have to be fulfilled before envisaging family formation: having a stable partnership, completing education and having a (preferably stable) job bringing some economic security for the family (Brachet *et al.* 2010). Both partners need to be ready to have a first child and they need to be ready at the same time. This requirement which appears to be the main requirement in deciding to become a parent explains that the length of time spent the living as a couple without children is longer than previously, thereby contributing to the postponement of family formation. This “régime d’infécondabilité” (Régnier-Loilier, 2007: p. 83) that distinguishes between sexual and reproductive behaviour makes it possible to live in a couple relationship without immediately forming a family.

## 3. ... But with variations by level of education

Fertility varies according to the level of education: high-educated women tend to have children later than low-educated women (table 8). Low-educated women have their first child when they are, on average, 26 years old whereas high-educated women have their first child almost five years later and not before the age of 30. The postponement of the age at first birth has however been longer for low-educated women than for the higher educated, respectively more than one year and almost four months between 2000 and 2008, thereby reducing the gap between social groups (Davie and Mazuy, 2010).

**Table 8: Average age of women at first birth by level of education, France**

	Year									2000-2008 (in months)
	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	
<b>No diploma</b>	24.2	24.3	24.5	24.6	24.6	24.7	24.8	25.0	25.3	+12.9
<b>&lt; baccalauréat</b>	25.5	25.7	25.6	25.8	25.8	25.9	25.9	26.2	26.1	+ 7.0
<b>Baccalauréat</b>	27.7	27.6	27.7	27.8	27.8	27.8	28.0	28.1	28.3	+ 7.6
<b>&gt; baccalauréat</b>	29.7	29.6	29.8	29.8	29.8	29.8	29.8	29.9	30.0	+ 3.9
<b>Total</b>	27.5	27.6	27.7	27.8	27.9	28.0	28.0	28.2	28.3	+ 9.3

Field : Women 15-49 living in households in Metropolitan France,

Source : Insee, Enquêtes annuelles de recensement (computation : Davies and Mazuy, 2010 : p. 491).

<sup>10</sup> The mean age at first birth has been rising constantly in France over the last four decades, as also in most European countries. Whereas in the early 1970s, the first child arrived when mothers were 24 years old on average, today the first child arrives when the mother is 30 years old.

Although the gap is progressively being reduced, there is still a difference in the norms regarding age at family formation. However, despite a higher fertility rate among low-educated women in France, their lower proportion in the population means the increase in fertility is due mainly to medium- and high-educated women. This situation contrasts with Germany. Indeed, more than 43% of children born in 2008 in France had a mother with a high level of education (*diplôme d'études supérieures*) compared to 34% of the children born in 2000 (Davie and Mazuy, 2010: p. 489).

High-educated women in France concentrate their reproductive life within a limited number of years, more limited than for low-educated women who tend to have more children and at a lower age and over a longer period of time. Only 5% of the high-educated women have a child before the age of 25 compared to more than one third of low-educated women. After the age of 35, high-educated women account for 20% of the fertility for their group, and the low-educated for 13% of their social group (Davie and Mazuy, 2010: p. 487, table 3). It is however the fertility rate of the low-educated that has increased the most. In sum, the increase in fertility rate over the past decade in France is due to both the low- and high- educated women, whereas the fertility rate for the medium-educated women has tended to fall. Trends are different in Germany where high-educated women often remain childless.

#### ***4. Childlessness: More common in Germany than in France***

Women and men are more likely to remain childless in Germany than in France. According to the 2008 German micro-census, the proportion of childless women has increased from 11.4% for women born between 1933 and 1938 to 22.4% for women born between 1964 and 1968 in West Germany, and from 8.8% to 10.8% for the same cohorts of women in East Germany (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009, quoted by Brachet et al., 2010). In France, according to the *Gender and Generation Survey* (GGS), slightly more than 10% of women in the 1930-1960 generations are childless, compared to one in five or one in six in Germany (Breton and Prioux, 2009a).

Childless men are more common than childless women in the two countries. The rate for men is almost twice that for women for the generations born in 1960. Breton and Prioux highlight the importance of family biographies to explain childlessness (defined as the percentage of childless couples among all couples). This percentage is higher in Germany than in France, especially among high-educated couples, whereas childlessness mainly concerns medium-educated couples in France.

In addition to family biographies (age at living in couple, age gap between partners), attitudes and opinions vis-à-vis women's participation in the labour force, sharing of family and parental duties, family values, and religion<sup>11</sup> also contribute to this behavior (Breton et Prioux, 2009a). Childlessness is also correlated with the level of income in Germany since low-income couples are more likely to remain childless than other couples, reflecting the impact of the limited support to parenthood in this country, at least until the recent reforms.

#### ***5. Family structures***

The proportion of young people (20-24) living in couple<sup>12</sup> (married or not) had been reducing between 1980 and 2000 in France, with a higher decrease for young women than for young men. This proportion tends to be stable over the last decade, making an interruption in the trend to decrease. In the mid-2000, slightly less than 20% of young men 20-24 were in couple compared to more than 30%

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<sup>11</sup> The impact of religion on fertility remains controversial in Germany (Petersen, Lübcke 2006).

<sup>12</sup> According to the census, a couple is composed of a man and a woman sharing the same main living place. Partnered people working in two different places but sharing the same dwelling are counted as living in couple.

for young women (Daguet and Niel, 2010). Young women live more often in couple than the men of the same age. They are also often living with older men. The gender gap was nevertheless higher in the early 1980 than today. Considering the age group 25-29, 48% of men and 62% of women were in couple in the mid 2000 in France (Cf. table in annexe 1). One major change is that today at the age of thirty, high educated women live in couple as often as low educated women. The situation was different until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the higher a woman was educated the less likely she was to live in couple. The formation of the couple used to follow the end of education or the entry into the labour force, therefore young high educated women postponed the living in couple compared to young lower educated women of the same age. Today, high educated women aged 30-40 are more often in couple than they were in the 1990 onwards. By contrast, low educated women are less often in couple today than before. As a result of these contrasted trends, about 74% of women aged 30-40 are in couple whatever their level of education. In this age group, only women with no diploma at all behave differently: they are only 67% to be partnered (Daguet and Niel, 2010). However, there is a similar trend to live longer in couple without children before family formation.

### **Family size: higher in France than in Germany**

In France, the postponement of the family formation (living in couple and first child) has little impact on final family size. The postponement of the first birth does not prevent couples from having a second and even a third child within a relatively limited time span (Breton and Prioux, 2005). The proportion of large families has nevertheless fallen over time thereby contributing to a concentration in family size around a norm of two children. France Prioux has shown that the fertility rebound in France might be due to the limited incidence of childless families and to the relatively high proportion of families with three children (Prioux, 2007).

Resulting from this trend in family formation, family size is on average higher in France than in Germany. For women born in 1960 who have now completed their reproductive period, we observe that 32% have at least 3 children in France compared to less than 17% in West Germany and 14,3% in East Germany. Although the norm is around two children in the two countries, the proportion of one-child families is higher in East Germany than in West Germany and in France. But what distinguishes West Germany from France and East Germany is the high proportion of childless women (table 9).

**Table 9: Average number of children per woman (1960 birth cohort), France and Germany**

Number of children (average)	France	West Germany	East Germany
0	10	19,0	7.3
1	18	20.4	28.2
2	40	35.8	43.2
3	22	11.9	10.5
4	10	4.9	3.8
Total	100	92.0	93.0

Sources: Toulemon *et al.* 2008 for France; Statistisches Bundesamt 2009 for Germany<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> German data are from the 2008 micro census. Acknowledgments to Anne Hornung, Max Planck Institute, Rostock, for providing the calculations. The gap of 100 refers to people who did not answer the question.



### **Family size: The gap between « ideal » and actual number of children**

The gap between intentions and realization is a major issue for demographers and policy makers. Whereas demographers explore the reasons for this gap, policy makers attempt to fill up the gap by implementing measures aimed at influencing decisions to have the number of children wished by individuals. Reasons for not achieving expectations are not well known however. Dorbritz (2005) estimates that the gap has been reduced considerably in Germany, leaving a very limited room to German family policy for maneuver (see also Salles *et al.* 2010).

Never the less, the gap between ideal and actual number of children is marked in all countries and especially in France and Germany. According to the *Gender and Generations Survey* (GGS) women aged 20 to 39 want to have 1.7 children on average in Germany compared to 2.3 in France (Höhn, Ette, Ruckdeschel, 2006 ; Klein 2006; Régnier-Loilier, 2006). In Germany, according to the same study, apart from an average of two children as an ideal family size, a relatively high proportion of respondents did not want to have children. This proportion was higher in West than in East Germany and also higher for men than for women (Dorbritz *et al.*, 2005). The higher gender gap in Germany may be explained by the heavier responsibility on men regarding breadwinning the family, compared to France where the responsibility is more shared between parents because of the higher women 's work commitment. Although fertility behavior tends to converge around a two children family norm in France, it tends to divide between two patterns in West Germany, either no children or more than one child (Köppen *et al.*, 2007). Some authors allude to the development of a “childless culture” in Germany (Sobotka, 2008; Salles *et al.* 2010).

Finally, France and Germany display a parallel evolution regarding fertility trends, but with a higher level for France. The gap has been increasing over the last decade questioning the conditions of family formation in the two countries. Changes in family formation are characterized by a postponement of the first birth due to both the lengthening of the period in education and the lengthening of the life in couple before having children. Meanwhile, there is a decrease in early pregnancies in the two countries. Resulting from changes in the fertility behavior and also in the family formation patterns is a reduction in the family size and an increase of childless men and women. Childlessness is more wide spread in West Germany as in France (and also in East Germany) therefore raising issues about the barriers to family formation in West Germany.

Reasons for low fertility level in some countries are an urging issue for governments, as also reasons for not realizing fertility intentions. Various constraints may weight on couples' decisions to have a child. Constraints vary according to the institutional and social context. They can also result from a feeling of insecurity due in particular to labour market uncertainty. However, one question is also about reasons behind the decrease in intentions in Germany. Does economic insecurity due in particular to labour market uncertainties at the age of family formation explain the decrease in fertility intentions? Is the impact of labour market uncertainty similar in all countries? How do the institutional and policy contexts interfere on decision to form a family? Is the impact of labour market uncertainty similar for men and women and across social groups? These questions will be explored in the following sections.

### **III - Patterns of family formation and fertility among young people with flexible jobs, unemployment and other aspects of job insecurity**

The impact of economic insecurity on family formation and fertility is a major issue for demographers and policy makers. However, the abundant literature on the issue does not converge completely. In this section, we examine how uncertainty regarding employment impacts on family formation among

young people. The analysis draws on a review of the literature and qualitative interviews in the two countries. We first examine the impact of the economic recessions on fertility behavior; then we focus on the impact of labour market uncertainties on fertility decisions among young people. Gender differences are explored to highlight the role of the male breadwinner regime in creating a family-friendly context.

### ***1. Assessing the impact of economic recessions on fertility***

Deterioration in the economic situation and its consequences for the labour market generally create not only a situation of economic insecurity but also a climate of uncertainty that prevent individuals from making plans for the future, whether or not they are personally directly affected by the recession. However, In spite of the current economic recession, the fertility rate continues to increase in France, thereby raising questions about the impact of the recessions (Pison, 2011). The increase in fertility in the past years in France has been unexpected because experts anticipated a fertility decline due to low economic growth and rising unemployment, which increase uncertainties for the future. But instead of declining, the fertility rate increased slightly. Some experts argue that the rise in unemployment might contribute to the fertility increase because unemployed women might have seen a period of unemployment as an opportunity to have a child. But Pison (2011) also argues that fertility would have probably been higher in France without the economic crises.

The literature shows that the impact of recession varies according to the pattern of recession, at least in countries in which the economic system has not changed. In most countries, economic recession impacts on the timing of birth more than on the fertility level (Sobotka *and al.*, 2010). Some couples postpone their plan to have children, thereby contributing to a reduction in the fertility rate within two years of the onset of the economic crisis. After the economic recovering, couples begin to have children again, thus contributing to a rise in fertility (Pailhé, 2010). These authors show that economic crises do not reduce fertility but rather contribute to the postponement of births. Postponement concerns mainly the first child, the impact being lower for the second or third births. Indeed when there is a first child the second birth arrives within a time period that was previously planned, being unaffected by the crisis. From French observations, Pailhé and Solaz conclude that it is the postponement of the first birth that impacts on following births (Pailhé and Solaz, 2011).

The postponement of the first birth is partially due to the postponement in living together as a couple or the delay in marriage resulting from the economic crisis and uncertainty about the employment situation. This link is however stronger in countries where marriage is still the precondition to have children, which is not the case for France (Pailhé, 2010).

The decision to postpone births depends on the situation of the couple, in particular with respect to the direct impact of the crisis on either member of the couple, on whether one partner has lost his/her job or is unemployed. However, as already mentioned, the overall economic context has an impact on fertility decisions even when the couple is not directly affected. As much as the economic recession, it is the feeling of insecurity that impacts on fertility decisions. Sobotka *and al.* (2010) observe that the economic context of the country (measured by the PIB or the unemployment rate) seems to impact more on the decisions of couples than their personal situation. Indicator of confidence in the future (as the “*indicateur de confiance des ménages*” in France) seems to have a greater impact on fertility than variations of the GDP or economic indicators (Pailhé, 2010). According to calculations by Goldstein *and al.*, a doubling of the unemployment rate might result in a decline of the fertility rate of only 0, 09 children (Goldstein et al. 2009).

There are however broad variations across countries regarding the impact of unemployment and economic insecurity on fertility. If, in general an economic recession results in a decline of fertility,

the opposite impact can also be observed, as in Finland for instance where the severe economic crisis in the early 1990s resulted in an increase of the fertility contrary to Sweden where the reaction was different<sup>14</sup> (Hoem, 2000).

In addition, fertility is less sensitive to economic recessions in countries with a well-developed family policy, and a policy supporting parenthood that provides a safety net in terms of income, health insurance and housing for parents, especially when they are exposed to unemployment or precarious employment status. One of the specific country factors explaining why countries with a similar GDP display different fertility rates is the role of female participation in the labour force and work-life balance policies aimed at supporting this participation (Lucy and Thévenon, 2010).

In France, according to Pison (2011), the relationship between economic recession and fertility is relatively inconsistent. A long-term perspective over the past 60 years shows that economic recessions over these decades have resulted in a decline in the number of births, which is not however the case for all recessions and notably for the last one.

### **The rise in fertility has slowed down during the last economic recession**

According to Pison (2011), the most recent economic recession occurred at a time when the fertility trend was rising in most European countries after a period of low even very low fertility, in particular in South, Central and Eastern European countries. Fertility was slowly rising in these countries (Pison, 2009), but the recession slowed down the trend in some countries while reversing it in others for example in Spain, Czech Republic, Estonia and Latvia. By contrast there was no change in France, neither in Germany where the recession was weaker than in most other countries. In addition, families have probably been less concerned by the economic recession because of family and social policies. In France, the fertility rate of women aged fewer than 30 has decreased over the past year but this decrease was compensated for by the rise in fertility of women over 30 years of age. This might mean that some young women have postponed childbirth.

In sum, the literature shows that a direct relationship between the economic context and fertility is hard to assess because other factors interfere with the relationship. The impact of the economic recession cannot be isolated from other factors impacting on fertility, for instance the norms and value systems related to parenting and children, or social pressure (Bernardi *et al.*, 2007 and 2008; Rossier and Bernardi, 2009). Social and family policies also matter, notably by reducing the feeling of insecurity. The loss of income for the unemployed or the socially excluded contribute to reduce this feeling. This is found in the qualitative interviews, especially with French respondents who are more confident about the future than German respondents. Family policies, notably childcare provision and the support for working parents also contribute to reduce the feeling of insecurity due to uncertainties in the labour market, especially at the age of family formation. This is more apparent in France than in Germany.

## ***2. The unemployment and fertility relationship: gender and class variations***

According to the literature, there is no clear evidence of the impact of unemployment on fertility. Once more, France stands as a specific case (or paradox) with a high unemployment rate for both men and women and a high fertility rate. Although several studies carried out in the 1980s showed that unemployment, and notably youth unemployment results in a decline in the fertility rate, notably the

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<sup>14</sup> The Finnish government set up a home care allowance in the mid-1980s for parents caring for a child until s/he reaches the age of three. This allowance stimulated fertility after the beginning of the economic crisis. Women who were affected by the crisis took advantage of this allowance to have a child and care for the child at home instead of looking for a job.

French Study by Méron and Widmer (2002), more recent findings show that unemployment often lead to a postponement of the family formation (Pailhé and Solaz, 2011). Using the survey “*Familles et employeurs 2007*”, these authors highlight the impact of unemployment and precarious employment status on the timing of births, but conclude that the postponement of family formation has no impact on the final family size because of a catching up effect. Short- and long term effects need to be distinguished when examining this relationship. The two authors also emphasize the contrast between men’s and women’s reactions to uncertainty and economic insecurity.

The impact of unemployment however differs according to who is unemployed within the couple. Male unemployment has generally a greater impact on fertility than female unemployment. But the gender effect varies across countries. Men’s unemployment is likely to have a greater effect in countries with a stronger male breadwinner family model where female employment is viewed as a complement to the male salary and where women often work part-time (*salaire d’appoint*)<sup>15</sup>. The gender impact of unemployment on fertility was highlighted by authors of a longitudinal survey on 13 European countries showing that before the mid-1980s short-term unemployment was positively associated with fertility for women, as if young women take this opportunity to have a child (Adsera, 2004). But persistent unemployment is associated with a decline in fertility. Another study by Schmitt (2008) using micro data from the European Community Household Panel (ECHP) survey analyses longitudinal samples of first birth transitions in France, Finland, Germany and the UK (1994-2001) found negative effects of unemployment on family formation among men but positive effects among women in all countries except France. The findings are particularly clear in Germany and the UK where work–family conflicts involve high opportunity costs of motherhood, due to the gender specific division of labour, which is highly traditional. The effect is particularly visible among women with a moderate and low level of education, for whom unemployment clearly increases the likelihood of having a first child (Schmitt, 2008). Even if this effect is weaker in France than in Germany and the UK, the effect is nevertheless gendered as shown by Pailhé and Solaz (2011). Within couples, male unemployment has a greater impact on fertility than female unemployment. This finding is clearly confirmed by the German interviews. For Amelia, what matters is having “enough money” which means “a stable job for the man”. But the French interviews tend to indicate that it is rather the overall household income that tends to be the main determinant in France thereby reflecting the different incidence of the male breadwinner family model (and the lower incidence of the family wage).

The qualitative survey shows that gender differences seem to be more important in Germany than in France. First of all, there is a widespread feeling among the German respondents that there are always obstacles to family formation whereas French respondents tend to be more confident in the future whatever the uncertainty of their employment and economic situation. Respondents in France feel more they are receiving more support from the state than in Germany, especially from family policy (see section 4, this report).

Nevertheless, if women’s unemployment has lower implications on fertility than men’s unemployment, it is also because the incidence of unemployment varies according to the education level and social position. When affected by unemployment or precarious employment conditions, high-educated women tend to postpone family formation whereas the opposite is observed for low-educated women who tend to advance the age at first birth when they are unemployed, at least in France (Pailhé, 2010). Thus, confidence in the future is highly correlated to work and career prospects for high-educated women, whereas it is correlated to a greater extent with children and maternity for the low-educated. For low-qualified women, unemployment tends to accelerate family formation

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<sup>15</sup> This is confirmed by the higher incidence of female part-time work.

whereas it slows down the process for high-educated women. This has been observed in Sweden (Hoem, 2000), in Germany (Kreyenfeld, 2005 and 2010) and in France (Pailhé and Solaz, 2009a; Orain, 2004; Charton, 2009). A similar impact was observed for low-educated men in the UK and Germany (Schmitt, 2008).

These findings highlight the various impacts of unemployment on fertility whether of men or women and irrespective of the level of education. The impact is also related to the different value attributed to parenthood according to gender and class. Access to the status of parent is more valued by low-educated men and women for whom employment and career prospects are low.

The impact of unemployment on fertility also depends on the age. Young women appear to be more sensitive to the economic insecurity than older women. In Germany, the postponement is less due to the incidence of unemployment for high-educated women than the conflicting commitments to career or motherhood. For these women, the feeling of insecurity is more connected to the overall conditions of childbearing that are viewed as not insufficiently family-friendly. Constraints on family formation are strongly perceived as being “mountains” that cannot be easily overcome because of insufficient support from policies or other actors. This feeling partly explains why so many high-educated women remain childless in Germany.

### **3. *The impact of precarious employment on family formation***

Fix term contracts and other forms of precarious employment (notably subsidized or mini jobs) contribute to uncertainties about the future. Precarious forms of employment have become a characteristic of the transitions from education achievement to emancipation from parental support (or the parental home). The lengthening of the transition to adulthood also contributes to the postponement of family formation but with an increasing diversity in the type of transition (Sébillé, 2009).

The impact of precarious employment according to the level of education on the postponement of family formation has been observed in different countries. South European countries are emblematic of this impact, especially regarding the age of emancipation from parental support (see Adsera, 2004). In France where the age of emancipation is earlier (without however being as early as in Nordic countries), young women affected by employment precariousness at the beginning of their work career tend to postpone the first birth in comparison with young women who are more secure with respect to employment status (Pailhé and Solaz, 2009a). In Germany, according to Gebel and Giesecke (2009), temporary work does not change the fertility intentions of the individuals. But it has an impact on the timing of births. German respondents support the idea that founding a family requires a secure financial situation, which means completing education and having a stable job. All the German respondents who are in precarious employment do not intend to have children in the immediate future. They all want to complete their education and training before thinking about family formation (Brachet *et al.*, 2010).

In Germany, precarious employment seems to be more worrying for men than for women (Tolke and Diewald, 2003). According to interviewees, women’s precarious employment is not a brake on family formation whereas it is an obstacle for men. In France, the gender gap is smaller: If one or the other member of the couple has a form of secure employment, the decision to have a child can be taken. These differences between the two countries are also reflected in the attitudes towards marriage.

## Different perceptions of the child costs in France and West Germany

Job uncertainty of one member in the couple does not necessarily result in economic insecurity for the household. Perception of economic insecurity depends firstly of the household income, secondly of the male breadwinner regime and thirdly of the perceptions of the costs of a child.

Interviews show that German young couples have higher expectations regarding the income level required to feel secure with regard to family formation. The level of the household income is very often mentioned and discussed in the German narratives while in the French narratives this issue has less importance. In addition, while it is mainly the male income that is determinant in the family formation decision, in France, wages for both members of the couple are perceived as important. So, the child is often perceived by young people as an additional risk, but higher in Germany than in France. Differences between the two countries may be explained by the perceptions of the costs of a child.

There is a large consensus among the German respondents about the high costs of children either with respect to time, direct costs and opportunity costs. First of all, children are perceived as high time consuming. The fact that this perception was more often quoted by German respondents can be related to the German school system: kindergarten and school are only opening in the morning, so parents have to take care of their children by themselves in the afternoon or to find another solution whereas access to childcare facilities in France is offered during the whole day. A second reason might be the norms regarding child needs and the representation of the child well-being. Indeed, children in Germany are given a high value in particular because of the conceptualization of children education and socialization. Mothers are the main provider of education and care which remains mainly a private matter contrasting with French respondents who consider in general that education and care of young children is a share duty between the state and the parents. Early education and socialization has been for long viewed as good for children. So, expectations of young couples in France are highly focused on support provided by the state and the family policy in terms of childcare services and financial support.

Secondly, the direct costs of children are perceived as being particularly high in Germany where respondents share a common vision of the high needs of children in terms of leisure, activities, toys and material well-being. So, for several German respondents, having a child means a risk of being down graded in the society because of the high costs induced. This appears in several interviews: *“If you have a child, you are downgraded. You have less money each month. You have no place in kindergartens ... you are in fact punished”* (Julia). Having a child is *“a social down fall”* (Arno). A child is a *“social risk”* (Dorothea; Inge). And *“A Ford costs 20 000 Euros, the baby costs also 20 000 Euros, so you have to decide where you invest your money”* (Martin).<sup>16</sup>

Additionally to direct and time costs, children have also opportunity costs that are perceived as being particularly high in Germany, notably because mothers tend to reduce their commitment into paid work by taking up a parental leave and then by shifting to part-time work and sometimes in mini jobs or in low wage jobs. German mothers tend to limit their career investment, therefore leading to low expectations in terms of wages. This attitude is resumed here: *“In 20 years, I will be almost 50 years old. There are now two possibilities for me. Either I will be human resources manager with a good job, devoted to my job while being in love with my boy-friend (e.g. without being partnered or married). Or, my children would be almost grown up and I would be able to return into work but not as a manager, but more probably as a clerk officer, and this will be also good”* (Anja). The alternative for German women is clearly enounced here: the alternative is career (without children and marriage)

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<sup>16</sup> The characteristics of the respondents are specified in annex 2 at the end of the document.

or children but with a low investment into work. Such a narrative was not found in the French interviews because most of the female respondents project themselves in the future as being both mothers and workers, thanks to the state and family policy support. In addition, most young female respondents did not plan to take up a parental leave to care for their child but rather prefer to go on working, preferably full time. For these reasons, the opportunity costs of children are lower in France than in Germany. The attitude of French women can be resumed by the following statement: *“I am somebody for whom autonomy is important and I will sacrifice neither my working life nor my personal life for my children. This can be temporary .... Because a parental leave ... may be a good thing .... But life to day is not easy: one needs two salaries to feel comfortable. And, one day, you can ... begin a new life with a new partner ... so, you can become lone parent and have to manage”* (Sylvie, no children). The master word in this narrative is “autonomy” and autonomy is dependent on participation to labour force. Autonomy is also related to the idea of being insured against the “accidents” of life and specifically in couples’ life.

The different perceptions of child costs in the two countries not only refer to family policy support that reduce the costs for parents but also refer to norms and values regarding working and mothering, as also norms regarding children well-being and education.

### **From the first to the second child**

We have seen that, in France, uncertainties in the labour market impact on the postponement of the first child, but have a limited impact on fertility because the second or even the third child arrives relatively rapidly after the first one. Labour market uncertainty has mainly an impact on the timing of birth but not on the final family size because of a catching up effect.

In Germany, there is often a fear that a child could adversely affect the relationship within the couple. Family formation is more difficult to envisage in Germany as indicated by the high number of childless couples. Having a child presents a challenge because people feel that there are too many obstacles to overcome, where they be economic (the cost of a child) or linked to the women’s feeling that a child will put an end to their career. Indeed after the first child, almost all mothers in Germany take up parental leave and then return to work part-time (table in Annex 1). The tension between working and mothering is stronger in Germany than in France for various reasons: the limited support to work—family balance, the societal organization of time, the opening hours of kindergartens and schools, the unequal share of parental responsibilities and the norms related to motherhood and the education of children. After the first child, the situation is more diverse in France, but a large majority of mothers continue to work after the birth of the first child. Few mothers take up a parental leave because they can rely on childcare facilities. In addition, the organization of social life allows mothers to continue working full time (table in Annex 1). In France, full-time work is still a strong norm both for men and women, and part-time work is rarely viewed as a means of reconciling work and family life, whereas in Germany it is directly linked to children and care duties. This is reflected in the interviews: When questioned about work and family arrangements after childbirth, most French respondents mention childcare issues (difficulties of access; possibility of choice between collective or individual childcare arrangements... ) while German respondents mention more often flexible working arrangements or parental leave arrangements, therefore appealing to employers initiatives rather than to the state.

Although the second child arrives soon after the first one in France, in Germany it is more problematic for at least two reasons: the costs (and availability) of childcare and the school hours that prevent mothers from working full time, which means that both direct and opportunity costs of children are higher than in France. So, there is a high pressure over the second child in Germany that was not identified among the French respondents. For many German respondents, having a second child means

a serious decrease in the standard of living and also a change in the life style. It also means a long career break for mothers who have to take up two parental leaves successively. This attitude towards the second child is reflected in the different family size structure in the two countries as mentioned above. It also reflects the social norms regarding family size that are lower in Germany than in France.

Finally, the qualitative survey shows that the Germans are in many ways more traditional in family matters than the French, but are more open to flexible work arrangements. More than the uncertainties in the labour market, the fertility regimes in the two countries are influenced by both the social/family policies, and notably the tax system and childcare system, and by cultural norms and values. The stronger male breadwinner family model in Germany implies that women tend to rely more on partners than on themselves for economic security.

These conditions might explain why German respondents in the interviews are less confident about the future than the French respondents. Confidence is undoubtedly a major issue in understanding the differences between the two countries. Children are often perceived as negative, not only for economic and financial reasons (the decrease of income) but because they are in competition with the couple relationship and the preference for leisure and freedom. By contrast, children are still perceived as a means of achievement for a couple in France (Letablier *et al.* 2011).

#### ***4. The impact of the insecurity feeling on reproductive decisions***

In this section, we have seen how the “milestones” in the transition from education to adulthood at the age at which education ends and access is achieved to a first stable job, and the age of emancipation from the parental dwelling have been changing over time. We have highlighted the impact of labour market uncertainties for the young labour force on fertility decisions, stressing the gender, educational and social class differences as well as the different incidence of the male breadwinner model of families. The survey of literature shows that there is no clear evidence of the effect of job uncertainties on fertility decisions. Interviews indicate however that more than “objective” uncertainties, it is the feeling of insecurity that drives fertility decisions for many respondents.

However, the feeling of being precarious or insecure is sometimes disconnected from the real situation. It also depends on the couple relationship: a woman can be in a precarious situation with respect to her employment conditions but secure with respect to her couple/family situation. This appears particularly with the attitude towards marriage in Germany that is for many women and men a security net with regard to the future. In addition, some work situations can be viewed as highly insecure in France while being the opposite in Germany, as for instance part-time work. For many women in France, part-time work means employment uncertainty and economic insecurity, whereas in Germany part-time work is more related to work and family reconciliation. In Germany, interviewees often refer to the stability of the man within the couple, and the woman finds an arrangement or adapt to the situation. In France, it is interesting to note that women generally refer to their own work situation and consider that what is important is that one or the other has a stable work situation.

In general, the feeling of economic insecurity is more widespread among people with poor low-paid jobs than among the high-qualified people who are more confident about the future (Cordazzo, 2010). The feeling of insecurity is a subjective indicator that does not only rely on the “level of confidence of the household” in a specific country but also on family arrangements. In their comparison of the effects of job instability on fertility decisions in West and East Germany, Bernardi *et al.* (2008) highlight the arrangements made by couples to deal with uncertainty especially in East Germany. In addition, the current situation in France where unemployment rates are high for both young men and young women do not appear to have resulted in a decline in fertility rates, which suggests that public policies may play a role in the security feeling.



## IV- Implications for family policies and welfare system regulations

Cross-national comparisons show that nowadays women's participation in the labour force tends to be positively correlated with fertility. Indeed, European countries with higher women's/mothers' employment rates are also countries where the highest fertility rates are registered. The positive correlation is generally explained by the impact of policies supporting parenthood and especially policies aimed at reconciling work and family life (Letablier et al., 2009 for a literature survey). By contributing to the improvement of the work-family balance, family policy is likely to create a family-friendly context that may encourage people to have children. Support for childcare facilities, parental or family leave, as well as work-life balance arrangements are the major domains covered by so called reconciliation policies that are explored in this chapter in order to scrutinize the possible effects of French and German family policies on fertility decisions for young couples.

Welfare system regulations will be also examined in a second stage to assess how they can be effective in providing security for young people both with regard to their income and employment position, thereby enabling family formation.

### *1. What is at stake in the French and German family policies*

According to the OECD family data base (2011), comparing the structure of family policy expenditure in OECD countries, France and Germany devoted respectively about 3.6% and 2.7% of GDP to family support. France stands as one of the most generous countries towards families among OECD countries (together with Iceland and Denmark). The two countries have in common a similar structure of expenditure distributed in cash benefits, benefits in kind and tax breaks. Both countries have substantially increased the expenditure devoted to families in the past thirty years. This support results however in a very different situation regarding fertility and mothers' labour force participation; different forms of support are not equivalent with respect to their impact, nor do they respond to the same objectives.

#### **Demographic challenges differ in the two countries**

Although France has a long tradition of consensus on demographic issues supporting family policy (the "pro-natalist" tradition), this issue moved back onto the policy agenda in Germany after decades of silence. Demographic objectives have driven family policy for almost a century in France, and still frame most benefits. The fertility issue is not on the current policy agenda due to satisfaction with the relatively high level of fertility in France compared to most European countries. In addition, population forecasts for 2030 do not anticipate a decrease in the labour force. The population will be stable at all ages between 20 and 60 years old, but with a population above 60 years that will be increasing and with a limited impact from migration.

By contrast, population forecasts are worrying in Germany where a decrease in the labour force is foreseen resulting from the population decline. As a result of the very low level of fertility and the drop of immigration, Germany already lost about 700 000 inhabitants since 2002 and the decline should accelerate in the coming years. According to the German Federal Institute of Statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt 2009), the German population should fall by 17 million and reach 65 million in 2060<sup>17</sup>. Nonetheless, the labour force between 20 and 64 years of age was relatively stable since the 90s. It counts about 50 million of people, that is 61% of the population; it is even more than in the 80s.

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<sup>17</sup> This is the result of the central scenario of the German Federal Institute of Statistics (Statistisches Bundesamt 2009). This scenario is based on the following hypothesis: stable fertility (1.4), life expectancy reaching 85 for men and 89 for women by 2060, migration balance reaching 100 000 in 2014 and then stable until 2060.

That's why some experts argue that there is no labour force shortage currently in Germany (Brenke 2010; Fuchs and Zika, 2010). But this should change very soon: The labour force is foreseen to decrease by 5.5 million by 2030 and by 17 million by 2060. The population decline and the expected manpower shortage have given a new impulse to the demographic objective in the recent family policy reforms (Fagnani and Letablier, 2011). This objective had been ignored for years. But there is still no consensus among experts on the reasons behind low fertility in Germany although the current decline in birth rates is the continuation of a long-term trend.

The impact of family policy, especially policies supporting working mothers, has often been highlighted in cross-national comparisons (Gauthier and Thévenon, 2009 for a survey of literature on the impact of public policies on fertility). Policies supporting parenthood have also been called upon to explain variations in fertility between France and Germany. According to Fagnani (2002 and 2007), variations in fertility rates between the two countries may be partially resulting not only from the amount of support but also from the forms of support received by working parents, whatever childcare facilities, parental leave or other kinds of support are provided by companies. Thus, the modernization of the German family policy in the last decade may be associated with the link that is made between policies supporting parenthood and fertility (Salles, 2009 and 2010; Klammer and Letablier, 2007; Fagnani and Math, 2007).

In the two countries, the lengthening of the transition to adulthood as also difficulties for young people in finding stable employment explain the family formation postponement.

### **Is there a climate more propitious to child rearing in France?**

In France the social pressure on couples to have children is strong whereas in Germany remaining childless tends to be socially more accepted. Policies supporting parenthood contribute to a family-friendly environment, notably by reducing the direct and indirect costs of children for parents. These policies tend to reinforce the “social pressure to have children” (Mazuy and Rosée, 2008) that is also conveyed by the family and the friends. According to these authors, the pressure is particularly strong in France where the protection of maternity is well developed as a policy area, although it has been changing over time to accommodate women’s claim for emancipation. Family policy has been adapted in response to the growth in female labour force participation since the 1970s, with strong support from the state not only for the reconciliation of work and family life but also for children’s early years education. The responsibility for children is shared between parents and the state. Meanwhile, policies supporting gender equality at work were developed from the 1980s, notably with the laws on gender equality at the workplace. Despite the ambiguity of several policy measures, reconciliation policies have been closely associated with gender equality policies (Lanquetin et al., 1999).

The continuity in public support for parents, the French « pro-natalist » tradition that still pervades the family benefit system and the progressive adaptation of family policy to the needs of working parents to prevent them from “sacrificing” their childbearing objectives to work requirements are major components of a family- and child-friendly environment that is viewed as propitious to fertility. It is this environment that has been said to be missing in Germany because of the limited support for working parents that recent family policy reforms were intended to create. From this perspective, the French child-friendly environment can be opposed to the “child-free culture” that would be developing in Germany. This childfree culture is often connected to the raise of individualistic values, especially among young generations, children being opposed to values of individual freedom.

### **A relatively limited class effect regarding fertility in France**

Fertility rates do not differ according to social classes in France (among women living in a couple relationship) whereas social differences are more marked in Germany between high-educated women

who often remain childless and low-educated women who are numerous to have children. In 2008, low educated women in France have the higher fertility rate. They have on average 2.5 children. Their fertility rate has slightly increased over the last ten years (from 2.4 to 2.5 children per woman). High educated women have the lower number of children, slightly less than 1.8 children per woman. Their fertility rate has slightly increased since the mid-2000. In fact, fertility decreases as far as the level of education increases. In France, the general level of fertility is due to both low educated and high educated women, while the middle class women tend to decrease their number of children (Davie and Mazuy, 2010).

### A strong consensus on early education of children in France

The strong consensus that exists in France on the shared responsibility for children between the state and parents contrasts with strong norms about the mother and child relationship in Germany. Although in France, childcare in collective services is highly valued by parents and the population in general, this form of childcare does not receive the same level of support in Germany, at least in West Germany. In addition, few childcare services are accessible all day, so hours of childcare services are not compatible with full-time work of parents. In 2010, only 6.5% of children less than three years of age were cared for full time outside the family (i.e. for at least seven hours a day) in West Germany (34.8% in East Germany).

According to some authors, support for childcare facilities might be the key point in fertility decisions (Salles et al. 2010). Availability, accessibility and quality of childcare may be important factors contributing to parenting decisions in a context where women increasingly participate in the labour force and are not likely to leave their job or abandon their employment career aspirations. Support for childcare clearly reduces the conflict between work and care responsibilities. Otherwise women in France who expect to work full-time would have to choose between working and mothering according to the value they attribute to one or other of these forms of identities.

**Table 10: Who cares for children in France and Germany?**

	Germany	France
<b>Children 0-2 (achieved)</b>		
- <i>Formal childcare (1)</i>		
*1-29 hours/week	8	14
* > 30 hours	8	17
- <i>Other childcare arrangements (1)</i>		
* 1-29 hours	24	15
* > 30 hours	3	14
* by a childminder (1)	7	13
* by family member or friends (1)	22	20
- <i>By parents (only)</i>	62	50
Average number of childcare hours (2)	n.r.	28.4
* informal childcare (hours/week)	n.r.	26.9
* other childcare		
<b>Children 3 to 6-7 years</b>		
- <i>Formal childcare (3)</i>		
*1-29 hours/week	61	52
* > 30 hours	26	42
- <i>Other arrangements (4)</i>		
*1-29 hours/week	29	24
* > 30 hours	1	3
- <i>By parents</i>	10	5

Source : Eurostat, EU-SILC 2006 (European Communities, 2009)

- Note :
- (1) % of all children less than 3 years old
  - (2) average number of hours per week
  - (3) School, kindergartens, day care centres
  - (4) Child minder or other family member or friends
  - Formal childcare: all childcare structures (crèches )
  - Other childcare services: child minder or a family member other than the parents.

Table 10 shows differences between the two countries regarding how young children are cared for according to their age. Children less than three years old are mainly cared for by their parents in Germany (62% compared to 50% in France that is a relatively high proportion). Not only the proportion of children attending formal childcare services, including child minders is lower in Germany than in France but the time spent in childcare services is notably longer in France than in Germany.

## ***2. The impact of family/reconciliation policy***

Reconciliation policy also refers to support for parental leave. Parental leave patterns differ substantially between European countries according to at least three criteria: length, payment and gender equality. Parental leave was completely restructured some years ago in Germany. The reform was emblematic of the “modernization” of German family policy. The reform was intended to bring better support to working parents, to offer a stronger incentive for women’s labour force participation and to limit the decline in fertility rates. Before the reform, German family policy focused on support to cover the direct costs of children on the assumption that raising children was a private matter. Little attention was paid to the needs of working parents and especially to women’s aspirations for work and career. Resulting from this policy orientation was a dilemma for women who had to limit their work commitment or moderate their family building plans.

### **Parental leave arrangements in the two countries**

The new German parental leave scheme offers a period of paid leave that is shorter than it was before (12-14 months) paid according to the previous salary (67-65%)<sup>18</sup> and with two months for the father. The new scheme offers more of an incentive than before to return to work. It is also less penalizing than in France for women with medium and high salaries and it is more oriented towards gender equity.

The French parental leave scheme and the parental leave allowance (or child rearing allowance) has been restructured several times since the 1980s. The last reform was in 2004 when the childcare benefit package (“*Prestation d’accueil du jeune enfant – Paje*”) was created in order to simplify the system. But the reform did not bring a great change in the system which is still framed by the “libre choix” principle. Parental leave is still long (it may be taken until the last child is 3 years old), paid with a flat rate allowance that differs with the rank of the child, with no specific incentive for the father to take up part of the leave. Resulting from this design, the possibility of choice is not the same for all social groups, and it is mainly women on low salaries who take up parental leave, whereas high-educated and well paid women (more career oriented) have an interest in continuing to work and have young children cared for in formal childcare because of the tax deductions for which they are eligible. Whatever the social group, fathers are little concerned by reconciliation issues despite the widespread egalitarian discourse in the political arena.

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<sup>18</sup> Between 67% and 100% of the previous salary for people earning less than 1,200 euro per month.

Despite the apparent radicalism of the German reforms, changes remain incomplete in bringing a substantial change in family behaviour. It is still possible in Germany to take three years parental leave (without leave benefits during the second and the third year). Besides, not only has the tax system not been changed but reforms of both labour market policy and welfare policy have resulted in the development of forms of employment that are mainly taken up by women and young people, therefore maintaining or even reinforcing the male breadwinner family model. Mini jobs are one of these forms (Informations sociales, 2011). In addition, the reforms mainly targeted high educated women who are numerous among the childless women. This underlines the ambivalence of the German family policy (Veil 2010).

### **Reconciling work and care depends mostly on mothers in Germany**

Availability of services, accessibility, and quality (notably hours of care) explain why in Germany mothers with young children take up parental leave and then return to work part-time whereas in France, relatively few mothers take up a parental leave while others most often return to work after maternity leave, often full time (see table 1, annex 1). Employment rates of mothers with a child under the age of 6 were 56, 6% in Germany and 62, 1% in France. Part-time employment rates for mothers with children aged 6-14 reach almost 60% in Germany compared to 28% in France. And for mothers with a child under the age of 5, figures are 46% and 22% in Germany and France respectively. This means that the incidence of children on mothers' employment is higher in Germany than in France. Our interviews also show that part-time work in Germany is used as a means of reconciling work and care duties: among part-time working women in our sample, no one said that she would prefer to be working full time. In fact, only 10% of mothers with children less than 3 years old in Germany work full time (Eurostat, 2009).

Some authors have shown that part-time work may be correlated with a higher fertility rate in some OECD countries (D'addio-Dervaux and Mira d'Ercole, 2005). In France however, part-time work is viewed rather differently being often considered as a precarious form of employment, resulting in economic insecurity with negative effects on the life course, especially for career prospects. Part-time work might explain the larger gender wage gap in Germany than in France (22 and 11 points % respectively) as also the smaller proportion of women among professionals in Germany (27% compared to 36,6% in France) (Eurostat, 2009: p. 168 and 178). And even for low skilled women, part-time work is often involuntary and connected with irregular working hours and poor quality of jobs. The family policy however tends to encourage mothers to take up parental leave at least part-time in order to maintain the links with the work place, thereby making the return to work easier.

Policies are undoubtedly more supportive to working mothers in France, not only by alleviating costs of childcare for parents but also by providing quality childcare services enabling mothers to work full time while child rearing. Family policy has provided a stronger incentive for women in France to pursue an occupational career than in Germany where gender roles have remained more specialized, and are therefore considered more costly for career-oriented women. This cost results in a high proportion of childless women among high-educated women as previously mentioned as well as a relatively high proportion of women with only one child.

To conclude on the implications of family policy for work-family balance, we have highlighted the contrasting demographic settings: the actual decline and ageing of the population in Germany and especially of the labour force thereby making the work and family-life reconciliation issue an urging issue. Policy stakes differ however in the two countries. Whereas the demographic issue is little discussed now in France after having been a consensual issue for decades, Germany has recently implemented an incentive policy.

### **3. Family policy support is perceived as being too limited in Germany**

We have emphasized the fact that family policies not only provide financial support for parents or individuals but they can also create a family-friendly environment that is more or less supportive of family formation. We now want to show from our interviews how confidence in family/social policies is important with respect to family formation, more specifically by limiting the subjective feeling of insecurity, thereby enabling couples to realize their aspirations regarding family formation.

The qualitative survey provides interesting insights into how young couples make up their mind about family formation. They also inform about how policy support for parenthood is perceived. There is a widespread feeling that the German state is not family-friendly and not sufficiently supportive to parents with children. Therefore, the cost of the children appears to be central in decisions regarding reproduction and especially with respect to the second or third child. The issue of economic security is central in the decisions, albeit highly gendered.

#### **The trade-off: children vs high living standard**

Most respondents in Germany emphasize the high costs of children due to the high expectations for their children, especially in terms of “being able to offer the best to children”. So costs are often estimated with reference to high standards of consumption (big house, high standard activities and leisure). Comparison is often made with their childless friends or neighbors who have a higher standard of living (big cars, high quality leisure): *"Our neighbor? She plays golf, she is happy to have a convertible, now she will have a jeep"* says Ulla.

The cost of a child is perceived by all the German respondents as being high. Almost all of them, with or without children, state that a “good” standard of living is necessary to form a family. Most of them estimate that a child results in a decrease in household income. For this reason, some respondents do not want to have children, although the main reason is that a child would result in a change in their life style (trade off between children and personal time). Some respondents use very strong language to justify their intention to remain childless: Arno says that children result in a “*social failure*” while Julia says that “*a child results in social deterioration of life*”. Some other respondents however simply do not feel ready to have children because they want to take advantage of life with their partner and friends. They do not want to limit their freedom because they know that “*a child would necessarily be at the very centre of their lives*” and they are not ready for that. This can be related to the fact that West German parents have to take care of their young children every day in the afternoon and even full time for the youngest because of the lack of formal day care services. This is an illustration of the outcomes from quantitative surveys highlighting the lengthening of the transition between the emancipation from parents’ support and the family formation. Living in couples without children tends to illustrate the liberty offered by modern contraception.

Many German respondents view their country as being unfriendly for children and families (“*There is no country as hostile to children as Germany*” says Claudia who laments the fact that people have to choose between “*a child or a financially comfortable social position*”). Even respondents who are economically secure consider children as a “risk” regarding economic and financial well-being.

So, deciding to have a child means a decrease in the standard of living. The cost is particularly high if the mother has to limit her work commitment. Having a child means a decrease in the household income due to the shift to part-time work. No mother in the German sample has returned to work full time after maternity leave. All have been on parental leave (from 10 months to 3 years) and all have returned to work but part-time. Several return to work for few hours a week. These mini jobs are low paid (400 Euros) but not taxable or submitted to social contributions, thereby making these jobs particularly attractive not only to employers but also to employees, in particular with reference to the

German tax system. This mothers' employment pattern has many implications, in particular regarding the gender implication of employment uncertainties on childbearing decisions. The gender effect differs in the two countries as shown by the interviews.

### **A strong incidence of the male breadwinner family model: Men's economic security more valuable than women's**

The high opportunity costs of children for women in Germany means that the economic responsibility for the family rests primarily with men. Several male respondents in Germany are aware of the breadwinning responsibility on their shoulders (*"A man must be able to support the family (...) and the woman to participate (...)"* (Martin). Jürgen also thinks that his girl-friend - he is actually single - will expect from him to support the family.

The distinction that is made between male and female duties (roles) also means that the female contribution to the household income matters less than the male contribution. Therefore what is most important for most couples is a stable "good" job for the man enabling him to support his family. Several women respondents argue that they postpone the first birth because their partner's earnings are not high enough, with no reference to their own situation, as if their commitment was more to motherhood than to household income. In dual-earner couples in which the woman has higher earnings and a more secure work status than her partner, family formation is postponed until the man finds a more secure position.

The interviews indicate that the male breadwinner model of family is still prominent among the respondents. Assessing the effect of employment uncertainty on fertility decisions supposes keeping this in mind, and notably that employment uncertainty and economic insecurity are a higher concern for men than for women, at least for the middle class respondents of the sample. According to the narratives, the male breadwinner family model seems to be more modified in France than in Germany, both in men and women's mind.

### **Women's work and care dilemma**

Several women respondents say that having children means abandoning career plans. Anja's comments are indicative of the dilemma between work and care (she has no children): She imagines herself 20 years later: *"In 20 years, I will be almost 50 years old. There are now two possibilities for me. Either I will be a Human Resources Manager with a good job. I would be devoted to my job while being in love with my boy-friend (e. g. without being partnered or married). Or, my children would be almost grown up and I would be able to return to work but not as a professional, and more probably as clerk, and this will be also good"*.

Several respondents also refer to friends in their circle who have high status jobs while being childless, stressing the dilemma in which they find themselves.

*"Our neighbor (...) she is building a career. She is single and will not want to have children. From time to time, she has a boy-friend. But she has a high position in a consultant company. She is happy with this situation" (...)* *"More women are now high educated (...) and want to have a career, so they remain childless because otherwise they would not have any chance..."* (Ulla).

These quotations are symptomatic of the dilemma faced by most of the female respondents. Not only they suffer from a deficit in policy support but also from the prevailing social norm regarding what it means to be a mother and what it means to raise children. For many female respondents, having children means sacrificing their career.

#### ***4. Implications of the welfare system regulations***

The welfare system regulations have been restructured over the last decade in the two countries. The restructuring was far reaching. A description of the reforms is provided in the Klammer and Ahles's paper (2010). The issue here is about the impact of these reforms on the young work force, especially as far as the security of transition into stable employment is concerned. To what extent these reforms aimed at making transitions more secure result in a change in the family formation, especially on the timing?

The so called "sécurisation des parcours professionnels" was a major issue in the French debates about flexibilization over the last ten years. Activation policies have for long focused on the young labour force that has been the most concerned by precariousness and insecure working conditions. Nevertheless, whereas these policies have been implemented without concern for family formation, they may have contributed to create an environment more or less propitious to family formation.

#### **Labour market regulations**

Labour market regulations in France and Germany have been explored by Klammer and Ahles (see the paper delivered for the WP3, 3rd seminar in Paris). Now the question is about the impact of social policies aimed at securing the young people concerned by unemployment and job insecurity on creating a security feeling with respect to future expectations. The literature says little about the interactions between social policy measures and their implications on reproductive decisions. The policy measures aimed at providing an income to young people excluded from the labour market have not been explored in detail so far.

#### ***5. Employers' attitudes and practices towards young precarious workers***

Both employers' social policies and employers human resources strategies can have implications on the young workforce, but in different ways regarding the "securisation" process and the hiring practices. First of all, young workers are more often than other workers on short-term contracts or on precarious work status that exclude them from some social rights and measures that are targeted on the insiders. Given their job uncertainty or precariousness they are less concerned by measures aimed at improving work and life balance although they would be the more in need of this support. Secondly, employers tend to develop specific attitudes towards the young workforce, especially women, extrapolating the risk of maternity, therefore tending to exclude young women from some social rights such as training. Thirdly, the working culture can have a strong impact on behavior, but different for men and women. Although employers tend to trust men with family responsibilities, they are more reluctant in giving responsibilities to women with children. The employers' attitudes may however differ from one country to another, especially because of the industrial relations context and also because of the different role played by the state in providing support to young parents.

#### **Young precarious workers are likely to be excluded from companies 'support to work-life balance**

The role of employers in supporting work-life balance for employees has been a major issue over the last decade in most EU countries. The implication of employers in work-life balance policies was highly impelled by the European Commission in order to facilitate the reconciliation between work and care responsibilities so to bring more women/mothers into the labour force. It was also aimed at fostering gender equality. Various measures were developed to improve work and life balance such as flexible working arrangements, flexible working time, reduction of working time, and support to parental leave .... (For an overview of these measures in EU member states, see: Plantenga and Remery, 2010; Riedman *and al.*, 2006).



The European surveys carried out by the European foundation for the improvement of the living and working conditions in Dublin provide information on employer's strategies and practices regarding working time and work-life balance (Anxo *et al*, 2007a, 2007b). Regarding Germany and France, the role of companies in the family policy modernization process has been explored in several studies, highlighting the role of employers (and beyond of social partners) in supporting the "new" family policy in Germany (Klammer and Letablier, 2007; Letablier and Veil, 2011) as also the implication of employers in the development of childcare facilities for working parents (Daune-Richard and Letablier, 2011). Support from employers to working parents is important, not only in terms of support to flexible working arrangements but also financially. Employers (especially through the "*comités d'entreprise*" in France) can contribute to reduce childcare costs for parents (Pailhé and Solaz, 2009 for France). Support from employers can also contribute to create a family-friendly environment that can be propitious to family formation or family extension. But, access to measures aimed at supporting working parents and their children is generally restricted to workers with open-ended labour contracts. The young workers on fixed-term contracts or on subsidized jobs are often excluded from these measures. As "outsiders" they do not benefit from this support. In addition they are often working in companies with poor social policy. So, at least in France young workers with precarious labour status are generally excluded from parental leave benefits or other measures concerning flexible working arrangements (mainly because of the eligibility rules). They are also rarely eligible for vouchers provided by the work councils (*Comités d'entreprises*) in France that tend to be more and more a major contribution to reducing the costs of childcare for parents or the costs of vacations and other family related costs.

### **Employers' attitudes towards young women's workers**

Although the issue was not explicitly raised in the qualitative survey, several respondents spontaneously mention employers as being reluctant to hire young women because they anticipate the risk of their becoming mothers thereby being likely to withdraw from work and/or to limit their commitment into the job. So, several women respondents, especially in Germany anticipate this employers' attitude by renouncing themselves to the idea of a career. For instance, Melanie says: "*Germany is a pity! Nobody but a mother has so many difficulties in finding a job!*" In some way, women integrate these difficulties in their behaviour: for instance Melanie refused a good job in the police because she was pregnant: "*This would have been unfair. I was pregnant!*" Similarly Barbel's temporary work contract was not renewed because she was pregnant: "*The contract ended. This was clear to me. I could not expect that the employer would have kept the job during my three years of parental and maternity leave. No, this is not possible*".

This behavior is not so often observed in France where the respondents are more concerned by the role played by the state in providing various forms of support to reconciling work and family life. This is particularly noticeable in the different focus of the French and German respondents. Although French respondents focus on childcare facilities and the role of the state in providing support to childcare, German respondents focus on flexible working arrangements and on working time possibilities.

German young women also anticipate that employers are not likely to invest in women's training, so they tend to see themselves as second rank workers that do not deserve investment from companies because of their probable lack of return on investment due to the lower commitment into work when women become mothers (See : report from Klammer et al., 2011).

### **Implications of the work culture on family formation**

The working culture may have implications on young workers' decision to have children. France and Germany probably differ from this perspective. Although in France trust and expectations are mainly

on the State for supporting family formation and families in general, in Germany, trust and expectations are more on social partners. But, work culture is hard to change because it is embedded in social norms and values regarding maternity and paternity, children well being and education, and state role. So, the working culture is likely to contribute to set up barriers to family formation.

Companies in Germany have attempted however to change the traditional working culture in order to welcome more women in the work force. Companies have explicitly supported the need for improving work and life balance by supporting the parental leave reform in 2007. In addition numerous enterprises support the programme “Local Alliances for family » that was initiated by the German government in order to stimulate local networks of actors in finding innovative ways for improving everyday life<sup>19</sup>. In March 2011, there were more than six hundred local Alliances for family in which 5000 enterprises were involved. Enterprises participate in 78% of local Alliances<sup>20</sup>. Enterprises’ commitment concerns three set of measures: workers’ information, flexible working time and childcare facilities for working parents. Some companies have developed childcare services for working parents while others support occasional childcare services during after school hours and holidays. However, despite the good will of some employers, these examples show that the companies’ implication remains limited both geographically and in the support provided to working parents to improve their work and care reconciliation. Access to childcare services remains limited and in many cases, it is more symbolic than a true and sustainable support to working parents. As Mechthild Veil says: “it is a ‘bricolage’ (Flickenteppich) rather than a true policy” (Veil, 2010).

Organizational responses to time pressure and strains remain limited in most European countries as shown by the company survey carried out by the European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions (Riedman et al. 2006). Despite the increasing participation of women in the labour force, women’s integration/assimilation into prevailing work place arrangements has not been fully organized. In most places women were expected to follow the male career template, and those who could not are relegated to part-time work, temporary or low wage services. Therefore, women have to decide whether being workers or mothers because it is hard to be both, especially in Germany where support from public policies to childcare is still limited. Meanwhile, fathers can be fathers-breadwinners and workers. Unlike Germany, women in France are entitled to more support from public policy therefore facilitating the assimilation into the existing male occupational and organizational work-life pattern. Work place organization has not however been changed or restructured for including women workers except however the limitation of working time by law for both men and women which is a major issue regarding work-life balance and gender equality. Women have nevertheless to make accommodations or arrangements in order to combine the two commitments. The different work place cultures, policies and practices around work finally produce contrasted couple work strategies (at least for middle class working couples) with husband having the main career job and wife working often part-time in less demanding short –hour-jobs. As already shown, most dual earner families in West Germany are in fact 1.5 earner families, whereas couples’ work experience is shaped differently in France since dual earner families are often composed of two full time workers. The temporal rhythms of work have not been however deeply reorganized.

In this section, we have emphasized the implications of labour market uncertainties of young people for family policies and Welfare system regulations. We have shown that family policies matter as also welfare systems regulations. Policy supporting fertility should be at the crossroad of employment

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.lokale-buendnisse-fuer-familie.de>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.lokale-buendnisse-fuer-familie.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/lbfff/Service/Zahlen\\_Daten\\_Fakten/Factsheet1.pdf](http://www.lokale-buendnisse-fuer-familie.de/fileadmin/user_upload/lbfff/Service/Zahlen_Daten_Fakten/Factsheet1.pdf)

policies, care policies and gender policies, thereby creating a family-friendly environment. Fertility policy in itself is probably inefficient in creating such an environment because fertility decisions need not only certain stability in couple relationship but also an economic security that is dependent on labour market stability. Moreover, not only policies matter but also the acceptance of these policies by the population. Trust in policies is undoubtedly a strong component of the security feeling.

## V – Implications of relevant norms and values in society

Researching reasons for fertility decline in Western countries has been a major issue for several decades. Various hypotheses have been pushed forward to explain the decline; they can be grouped into three clusters: economic reasons, diffusion of modern contraceptive methods and change in social values and attitudes towards parenthood and childrearing. Changes in social norms and values have been seldom explored so far. Social norms and values are however reflected in legal codes, institutions, policies and interpersonal relations.

Childbearing and childrearing are social acts in all societies. The number of children born determines the population size that is a major social concern. And decision to have children is framed by prevalent social norms about parenthood and childrearing. In this section, we examine how social norms frame childbearing decisions of young people. The analysis is based mainly on a review of literature completed by an analysis of the French and German interviews.

Comparing social norms about parenthood in Germany and France, Didier Breton and France Prioux (2009b) found that three types of norms play a prominent role in assessing fertility variations between the two countries: norms concerning the number of children that shape the ideal family size; norms concerning the timing of births and norms about childrearing that shape the parental roles, their gender component as also the share of responsibilities between parents and professionals.

The family environment may also impact on the decision to become parents or to have more children. Rossier and Bernardi have shown that it may impact on the timing of births (Rossier and Bernardi, 2009). In addition to the pressure from the family or the kin, the social pressure to have children may also impact on reproductive decisions (Mazuy, 2009). By contrast, individualism and hedonic values may contribute to childlessness or to reduce family expectations. Religion and religious commitment may also impact on reproductive decisions: Arnaud Regnier-Loilier and France Prioux (2009) show that voluntary childlessness is lower for couples with effective religious practice than for other couples.

### ***1. Social norms regarding children and their subjective value: the place of the child in the couple***

Referring to the history of the representations of children, the historian of childhood Philippe Ariès (1975) has shown how representations in France have shifted from the “enfant-roi” to the “enfant-gêne” who hinders the freedom of the individuals and couples. This shift is made responsible for the fertility decline, young adults preferring their liberty to constraints due to children. This argument that puts forward the growing individualism in Western societies has also been developed in Germany (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). According to this assumption, voluntary childlessness would be emblematic of the post-modernity values whereas emotional value of children characterised the modernity era and economic value the pre-modernity (Zelizer, 1994).

According to our qualitative survey, the child is valued both in France and Germany as a major contribution to becoming an adult, to the self esteem and to the consolidation of the couple relationship. The emotional value of children is high in the two countries. In Germany however, some respondents do not want children because they prefer to be free and to have more leisure time. In this case, children are competing with liberty. This can also be explained by the high involvement of parents in child care in Germany. This attitude is more rarely observed among French respondents

who all highly value children whatever their living style, job uncertainty or economic insecurity. They also value parenthood as providing a status that gives a place in the society.

### **The trade-off in Germany**

Most German respondents want to have children except a small group who prefer having more leisure time or living longer in couple without children. The high costs of children is often mentioned but mainly by parents who already have one child but renounce having a second one because they would not accept a decrease in their standard of living. Another reason for not having children is also due to the high value put on parenthood and notably on motherhood. This group of individuals says that it would be irresponsible to have children because they feel being unable to rear children correctly, or because it is irresponsible to bring a child into this world for ecological reasons. Other reasons given for not having children or a second child are also the willingness of being more committed in work career or training for improving career prospects.

Finally, three clusters of reasons can be identified that leads to renounce having children or to limit their number: firstly arguments attached to individualistic values (freedom); secondly arguments are referring to direct and indirect costs of children; thirdly arguments that refer to social norms regarding motherhood and childrearing.

The spreading of individualism is highly bound to the costs of children; both direct and indirect costs (see section 3). Indirect costs (or opportunity costs) are also related to the work and care dilemma for women, especially for the higher educated women, often resulting in a renouncement to have children. For these women, childrearing would be too much time consuming at the detriment of work and career. The strong values attached to motherhood and childrearing leads mothers to make choices regarding career and work commitment. A child is viewed as “a full time job” that do not allow mothers to have another job, or only part-time. The German respondents’ focus on the costs of children indicates that children are often perceived as a social risk (a downfall in the social status as measured by the standard of living) and as a risk for women who will have to choose between conflicting identities and commitments.

So, new aspirations (to work, to leisure... ) and new attitudes towards childbearing and childrearing contribute to disseminate individualistic values driving fertility decline. But the rhetoric of individualism is not spread similarly in all societies and in all social classes. It seems for instance less wide spread among the French respondents. One reason might be the strong social pressure to have children that is strongly imbedded into the French family policy as shown by various authors in France (for instance: Le Bras, 1991; Le Bras *et al.*, 1997)

## ***2. Social norms regarding parenthood***

The family is highly valued by the French respondents, men and women, confirming the results of opinion surveys (see, Chauffaut and Domingo, 2011). The value given to the making of a family can explain by contrast the stigmatisation that is on voluntary childlessness in France.

The French survey “Histoires de vie” carried out by the INSEE in 2003 on a sample of 8400 individuals representative of the French population, included some questions about values and identity. To a question on “What can better define yourself?” 86% of the respondents answered “the family”, followed far behind by “work” and “friends”. The ranking depends on the profile of the respondents, as also of the perception of the family role. Work is quoted by high educated respondents. Women in high position or with a medium education level define themselves more often than men by their occupational situation. Defining oneself in reference to friends is more common

among young people and students. So, the family is still the pillar of identities for French people despite the changing structure and forms of families (Housseaux, 2003).

### **Becoming an adult: what is more important?**

The European Social Survey (ESS) provides some interesting data about what is perceived as being the main step for becoming an adult. Chanvrlil et al. (2009) have examined four criteria in order to map the variation across European countries: having left the parents' home; having a full time job; living (or having been living) in couple; and being a parent<sup>21</sup>. According to these authors, having been living in couple is never ranked first or second in the ranking of criteria to become an adult. But access to employment is viewed as an inescapable element. Having a full time job appears to be the key element of the economic security and therefore crucial criteria in the transition to adulthood. In the clustering of countries proposed by the authors, France and Germany are in the same cluster that is characterized by a wide gap between generations regarding the major criteria to become an adult, thereby showing a substantial generational gap in the value system. Although the major criteria for the 55 and more respondents is being a parent, this criteria has a lower importance for the 35-54 years old generation who rank at the first place the emancipation from the parental home.

Becoming a parent is perceived as being very or rather important for becoming an adult in France and Germany compared to Sweden, Norway and the UK for instance where this criteria is not ranked so high (Chanvrlil et al., 2009). These authors highlight the role of the value system on life trajectories. Individual trajectories towards adulthood are not only driven by social living conditions of the young people but also by their own value system that is influenced by the belonging to a community or a social network, by religious commitment, by the family tradition ....). The major outcome of the Chanvrlil et al. (2009) European comparison is to insert parenthood behaviour into trajectories towards adulthood. They finally identify four transitions towards parenthood according to the individual value systems: the "early birds" and the "family oriented" that are influenced by religious values opposed to the "independents" and the "intermediary profile" that are less concerned by religious values. The "early birds" are characterized by short transitions to parenthood due to a speed up of the steps whereas the "independents" have long transition trajectories due to a stretching of the different steps. By contrast to the "family oriented" the "independents" are more "work oriented". They give priority on work stability and economic security over family formation. The "family oriented" tend to live longer with their parents. These "home centred" individuals are more often women than men. They are numerous in South European countries. The authors also point social class differences between these profiles: whereas the "independent" tend to belong to the upper class and to be characterized by openness, tolerance and "secular values" the "early birds" and the "family oriented" tend to belong to middle class. The "intermediate" profile is closer to the "independent" than to the "family oriented".

In the Population policy Acceptance Study (PPAS), 80% of respondents in East Germany and 51% in West Germany supported the statement according to which "I cannot imagine that one can be happy in life without having children". This gap indicates that for a large number of West Germans children are not a source of happiness and self-esteem<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Another criterion is also under consideration in analysis that is having finished school and education. These five criteria are usually considered as being indicators for becoming an adult (see: Settersen RA, 2007, "passages to Adulthood: linking demographic change and Human development", *European Journal of Population* n° 23: 251-72. See also: Van de Velde C., 2008, *Devenir adulte. Sociologie comparée de la jeunesse en Europe*. Paris : PUF.

<sup>22</sup> Wasn't involved in this international survey, so comparison is not possible.

## A strong « fertility pressure » in France

The notion of « norme procréative » was suggested by Bajos and Ferrand (2006) in order to specify fertility behaviour in France. This norm was defined by the authors as “a set of social conditions stimulating parentality” as for instance the mother’s age, the marriage situation, and the sexual orientation. This norm contributes to a stronger « social pressure to have children» (Mazuy and La Rochebrochard (de), 2008) in France than in Germany.

This norm can be approached by exploring the attitudes towards childless couples as did Breton and Prioux (2009a). As early as the mid 1990s, Laurent Toulemon (1995) shows that very few couples remained voluntarily childless in France. Childlessness is often due to medical reasons or to exclusion from the marriage market (Prioux *et al.* 2010).

Pressure can come from the society, the family or the peers and be relied by all the public space. This pressure is felt by the French respondents, sometimes producing suffering and stress, in particular for women concerned by finding a partner on time (Brachet *et al.*, 2009). The social pressure is however perceived differently whether you are high or low educated. High educated women who have been for long in education before being committed now into a carrier give an ideal age for childbearing between 30 and 40 years old. Being more committed into work and carrier, they do not feel so strongly than other women the social pressure to become mothers.

In the French sample, all the respondents want to have children. Most of them say they could not imagine life without children because children are closely associated to happiness:

*“(…) It would have been my fear not having children. It would have been very hard for me. Very hard! We would have found a way to ... We always wanted children. If we had been more secure with our jobs, we would have had children earlier. We had to wait for being stable in employment; otherwise we would have had children as soon as possible because we were longing for that.”* (Camille)

*“I cannot imagine myself without children around me. And if I do not find a partner, I think I will adopt a child. That’s for sure. I do need to transmit something...”* (David, no child, no partner)

Absence of desire for children seems unthinkable to most respondents:

*“This is the beginning of a family life. (...) Being partnered and no willing to have children is inconceivable ... if we live in couple, it is a family life that we need”* (Damien)

*“I am very happy that I could have a child. Because if one or other could not have had a child, we would have been very very sad. Yes, home without children, a couple without children .... No ... we would have adopted a child. I wouldn’t be remaining childless. No. It would have been very sad. I cannot imagine this situation.”* (Anne-Sophie)

Being voluntary childless is considered by many French respondents as a sort of anomaly, a transgression of social norms. The “désengagement maternel” (Robert-Bobée, 2006) results less from a voluntary refusal to become a mother (*Childfree*) than from a postponement of maternity that finally lead to unwanted childlessness.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> About 10% of women born between 1945 and 1953 and 14% of men born between 1943 and 1951 are childless in France. The gap between men and women is mainly due to the higher number of single men, especially among lower educated men. Opposite, higher educated women are more often childless than other women, but childless women are less numerous than in Germany. Not only high educated women are less often partnered than the lower educated women but they have less often children when they are living in couple (Robert-Bobée, 2006, op. cit.).

Childless women (as also men) justify this situation by their life style which is not viewed as being compatible with a family life or with child well-being that they are not able to assume (Donati, 2003). Having a child is not a priority for them. The intention is vague and far, and the realisation remains uncertain since the required conditions are too difficult to fulfil. Being childless is generally the result of a complex life trajectory, but is rarely a voluntary option.

### **Is there a development of a “childfree” culture in Germany?**

Although the social pressure to have children in France is embedded in a long tradition of pro-natalist family policy, the situation is different in West Germany where the social pressure is lower since the demographic challenge has not been on the policy agenda for several decades (Fagnani and Letablier, 2011). As a result the social meaning of children may be different in the two countries.

Individuals who do not want children argue that they want to be free and to preserve their personal life. For these individuals, the costs of children are not an argument. It only becomes an argument when the second child is being discussed within the couple.

### **Ideal number of children and timing of births**

There is a great contrast between France and West Germany with regard to the ideal number of children. There is in France a large consensus among the respondents against a single child. Being a single child could be boring, but other reasons mention values of sharing, mutual support, family relationships ... Therefore, most respondents say that two children would be better, and even more for most of them. This is confirmed by opinion surveys. According to the opinion survey conducted in 1998 by INED and INSEE, 47% of the respondents said that the ideal number of children in a family is 2 whereas 38% said it is 3 and 12% supported the ideal number of 4. Less than 3% of the respondents supported the idea of a single child and almost nobody supported the childless family as an ideal (Toulemon and Leridon, 1999). So, at that time the ideal number of children in a family was 2.6. However, 32% of women and 21% of men have to reduce the effective number of children regarding the ideal, mainly for economic reasons. Change in expectations is higher between 25 and 35 years, at the age of becoming parent. For 59% of the respondents, the gap between ideal and effective family size is due to unemployment, insufficient wage or to only one earner in the household<sup>24</sup>.

These attitudes towards single child are confirmed by the interviews:

*“I have several friends who were single children and I think that this situation is rather difficult to handle with. Ideally, I would prefer that my child would not have to grow up alone. Two children would be better.”* (Patrick)

*“One? one... my feeling is that one child can become selfish because he has everything for himself. It is not at all my view. I like to share with friends and others. In fact I do not know people who only have one child.”* (Sylvain)

*“Having a brother or a sister, even somewhere else means that we have something in common, links ... My brother is ten years younger than me but we are often together. We like very much each other and if one has something wrong, we can help and support each other...”* (Thierry)

Most of the German respondents share this point of view. They would prefer to have two children (or have already two), and sometimes even three. We can distinguish two types of reasons. First, they think it's the best for the children. They think that it is important for a child to have a sister or a brother, to learn to share, to have somebody to play with and to learn "social rules" with their sister

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<sup>24</sup> Ideas about ideal family size undoubtedly influence the behaviour. Two or three children families remain dominant in France. Among women who were born in 1960, 40,1% have had 2 children, 21,9% had 3 children, 17,9% had one child, 9,7% had 4 and more children and 10,4% remained childless (Robert-Bobbée, 2006).



and brother (Uwe). They fear that a single child will feel alone and they wish their children to build a strong relationship with their sister and brother. Stefan thinks that having only one child should be "forbidden". Second, some respondents relate their choice to themselves and with their own experience: some of them argue that they also had a brother or a sister and other are afraid of feeling very lonely when they will be old as Christin and Jürgen who are both only child and their parents also. Petra had a wonderful experience with her first child and would like to experience it a second time. But for many German respondents the wish to have two children is evident, so that they don't mention any special reason: they wish to have children "in any case" (Franziska, Petra): *"For us it was clear, we both wanted to have children (Tobias).*

But many German respondents also wish to have only one child. In most of the cases, they are hesitating having a second child, not because they think it's better for the child, but for financial reasons.

*"My husband always says, I would also like to live and to have a little bit more money. A second child now would mean that we will have to be careful with household expenses. It means that we will have to tighten one's belt!" (Britta)*

Decision not having a second child is mostly related to their own needs as parents. They argue that being a single child in the family is not a problem. Britta's husband for example argues that there are also children in the neighborhoods, so that their daughter can play with other children and thereby learn social life.

Concerning the decision to birth a second child, the issue for German respondents is mainly about child costs, especially the indirect costs due to mothers' reducing of work commitment, firstly by taking up another parental leave and secondly by returning to work part-time or sometimes not returning to work. So, a second child means a decrease in the household income that is underlined by all the respondents. So, the costs of a second child are the major reason behind the development of a norm in German family size at one child (Breton and Prioux, 2009b).

### **The ideal age for becoming parent**

The decision to become parent requires a range of conditions regarding employment stability, decent housing conditions, and decent income. It also requires a stable partner and to "be ready together" (Mazuy, 2006). Beyond these conditions are also social norms concerning the "good" age for becoming a parent.

Using the third wave of the European Social Survey (2006-2007), Chanvrlil et al. (2009) observed a great homogeneity in European opinions about the ideal age for becoming parent. In a majority of European countries, the ideal age follow a bimodal curb with a first point at 25 years and a second one around 30 years.<sup>25</sup> In all countries the age around 25 is more often quoted appearing as a "*moment charnière*" to become parent. This ideal age seems to be connected with the respondent's experience of parenthood, making it difficult to identify a causal relationship between representations and practices (Chanvrlil et al., 2009: p. 54).

Although most respondents to our survey reject the notion of "ideal age for maternity" on the assumption that "everybody is free to act according to his/her preference and desire", the postponement of the age at the first birth (chapter 2) seems to have been integrated as an "ideal". For a large number of respondents in our sample, the ideal age is between 25 and 30 years, but with the idea, in France and in Germany, that "*what is important is to be ready*" (Brachet et al., 2010). The gap

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<sup>25</sup> The question was: "What is the ideal age for becoming a father or a mother?"

between the ideal age at first birth (25.1 years old for women and 26.6 for men) and the practice (27.6 years old on average for women and 29.6 for men) may be explained by the time required for making up the conditions (Régnier-Loilier, 2007, op. cit.: p.101) or by constraints due to uncertain situation on the labour market.

So, social norms regarding the age for becoming a parent have increasingly become softer however differing according to gender and class. The French survey indicates that there is a social cleavage between high educated women and other women. Being young at first birth that is less than 30 years is higher valued by low educated women whereas higher educated women don't envisage becoming a mother before 30, and rather between 30 and 40, because they wish to be insured with a good professional situation and to have some time with their partner without a child.

Most German respondents say children should not come too early since having a child when you are young (or too young) is likely to result in a social downgrading as mentioned earlier. Childbearing at young age is viewed as being a social class "marker" as shown by Ninas' comments: *"the more women are high educated, the less they have children because they have another view about the German situation. Whether low class people still have so many children and often from different fathers ... I don't know .... But I find it fearsome. But it's always like that. The more women are educated, the less they have children. Yes, the economic context may impact on their decision ... They do not want to renounce to their job. Imagine! I have been in high education for five years and if I have a child I will have to leave my job .... This is hard but this is probably the reason ...". "The rich will not spoil their good life with children. They probably want taking advantage of their wealth. Over the last decades we could see that children are produced by the low class families, whatever the reason"* (Anja).

### **3. Contrasted attitudes towards marriage in the two countries**

For a large part of the French population, marriage is no more the pre-condition for family formation. As we have already mentioned, one child on two was born now outside wedlock. One could say that in France, it is the child that makes up the family. In many cases, the marriage of the parents comes later after the family has been set up, or even never.

This is not the case in Germany where marriage is still highly valued for at least three reasons: firstly, marriage is perceived as a duty vis-à-vis the child (*"un devoir vis-à-vis de l'enfant"*). Martina underlines that she couldn't *"do that to the child"*, i. e. having a child born out of wedlock. A child born out of wedlock is often still considered in Germany as an illegitimate child. That is probably the reason why German institutions still don't recognize cohabitation, so that the father has no rights on his child born out of wedlock. The second reason is that marriage is required for fathers having parental responsibility on children. Third, marriage brings a financial security for women notably because many of them do not intend to keep their job after giving birth to the first child, or intend to work part-time. As a consequence, they will have to rely on a breadwinner. So, marriage seems somewhat necessary to found a family in Germany.

#### **Marriage: « Passage obligé » to family formation in Germany vs legitimization in France**

Among the "milestone" of the transition to adulthood, marriage is increasingly of less importance, with variations across countries. Today in France, marriage is no longer a prerequisite to family formation for most men and women, although in Germany marriage remains a "passage obligé". Transition to parenthood is however less and less connected to marriage. In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, children generally arrived after the parents had married. Nowadays, marriage is no longer a condition for family formation since a growing number of children are born outside wedlock. The number of

cohabiting couples is growing almost everywhere. The decline in the number of marriages does not mean a regression in the propensity of couples to live together, except for high-educated women in France who are likely to live alone and without children (their proportion is twice the level for low-educated women). By contrast the high- educated men are more often living in couple than other men (Daguet and Niel, 2010). Meanwhile the number of PACS<sup>26</sup> has increased since arrangement was legalized in 1999 in France: in 2009, two unions were of Pacs couples for every three marriages (Pla and Beaumel, 2010). Since 1990, the age at first marriage (for those who marry) has been postponed by one year for every six years on average. The mean age of men at first marriage is two years more than for women: men marry on average at 31.6 years and women at 29.7 years. Nevertheless, increasingly in France, marriage occurs after the family is formed (Prioux et al., 2010).

Not only are marriage and family formation more and more likely to be dissociated, but are also the formation of the couple and the formation of the family. Modern contraceptive methods, abortion and the higher female labour force participation have contributed to dissociation between sexuality, procreation, unmarried cohabitation and marriage, by giving women opportunities for increasing autonomy (Charton, 2010). The growing contribution of women to household income has also transformed the family formation process, notably by lengthening the period of time living in couples without children.

Qualitative interviews provide a good illustration of these data highlighting the differences between French and German respondents regarding attitudes towards marriage. Most of the German respondents consider that children should come after marriage because marriage is a mean of reducing uncertainty both with regard to the stability of the couple and to economic uncertainty. Indeed many couples calculate that marriage is advantageous for taxation reasons. Another incentive for marriage concerns children: firstly, the fear of having an “illegitimate child” is rather wide spread within the respondents, and secondly, marriage provides men with rights over their child. One German respondent says: “*I cannot do that to my child [e.g. being unmarried].*”<sup>27</sup> This moral attitude towards children born out of wedlock is not widespread among the French respondents. Whereas in Germany people say they marry because they want to have children, in France they often marry after having children. In France, however, tax benefits from marriage are lower than in Germany, therefore reducing the financial incentive for marriage.

#### **4. Social norms related to gender roles**

The comparison of couples (25-49 years) organization with respect to labour force participation shows important variations between the two countries (see annexe 1). Dual full time earner couples are more common in France than in Germany (52% and 37% respectively of all couples (20-49) with at least one earner (Aliaga, 2005). By contrast, couples composed of a man working full time and a woman working part-time are more common in Germany than in France (28% and 16% respectively). The proportion of one earner couples (man working) is rather similar in the two countries: 26% of all couples with at least one earner in Germany and 25% in France) (see chart 2, annex 1). Only 2% of couples are composed of two part-time earners in the two countries whereas in 7% of couples in Germany only the woman is working (5% in France). This picture of couples’ working arrangements in the two countries in the mid 2000 reveals that the male breadwinner model of families has been eroded in the two countries though in a different way, indicating different attitudes and values towards

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<sup>26</sup> The « Pacte civil de solidarité » (Pacs) is a contract between two same sex or different sex adults wanting to formalize their life together. The Pacs was legalized as a form of civil union under French Law in 1999.

<sup>27</sup> It should be remembered that the notion of « illegitimate child » was only recently deleted from official texts in Germany.

working and caring, as also towards gender roles and identities. Nevertheless, not only attitudes and values differ between the two countries but they also differ within Germany between old and new Länder highlighting the weight of history.

According to data provided by the Euro barometer survey in 2006, 21% of women aged 15-39 in West Germany agree with the statement according to which “A preschool child is more likely to suffer if the mother is working” compared to 14% in France and 6% in East Germany<sup>28</sup>. This rather small proportion however indicates that working mothers have become a norm, but less in West Germany than in East Germany or France. Similarly, 17% of this women’s cohort in West Germany were supporting the statement “Ideally, the mother should stay home to care for children” compared to 8% in France and 7% in East Germany. Finally, 27% in West Germany agree on this sentence “All in all family life suffers when the woman has a full time job” compared to 13% in France and 9% in East Germany. Similar findings are found from a German survey carried out with parents of young children (under 6) showing that only 15% among these parents supported the idea of full time employment for mothers whereas 66% felt that part-time work was a better option, and 10% that women should stop working (Institut für Demoskopie Allensbach, 2007, quoted by Fagnani and Math, 2010). Not only the behaviour towards professional life is shaped by these attitudes towards mothers’ roles but also by long standing attitudes towards what is viewed as the best for children’s well-being.

### **Attitudes on parenthood and gender roles**

The ERFI survey<sup>29</sup> provides interesting outcomes about opinions on fathers’ role. The role of fathers in the family sphere is increasingly supported in particular by the youngest respondents. For instance, after divorce or separation of the two parents, 42% of the respondents state that it is “neither better, nor worse for children to stay living with their mother” whereas 30% have a preference for children staying with the mother as the main carer, and 28% are against this idea. But once again, there is generation effect in opinions about fathers’ role. The youngest respondents are not as supportive as the older respondents of the children staying mainly with the mother after separation: 22% of the under 25 years old against 45% of the 75 years old and more. Moreover, 30% of men disagree with the preference given to the mother for being the main carer. But 90% of divorced respondents agree with it. In fact, the number of fathers who are given alternative custody of their children has increased from 12% of divorces with children in 2003 to 14% in 2006<sup>30</sup>. But care responsibility given exclusively to fathers is still not common (7% in 2003). In the sample, some male respondents would like sharing childcare responsibilities. For example, some would like to share parental leave with the mother or to work part time. But most of them have to face reluctance from companies or institutions and have to overcome social norms regarding gender roles in parenthood.

## ***5. Norms and values related to the child well-being and education***

Attitudes towards mothering and mothers’ role in education and sociability of children are closely linked to views regarding children’s well-being. In West Germany there is a widespread belief on mothers’ care as being the best for young children, at least until the age of one year. Stefan underlines that a woman should not have a child if she is not ready to take care of the child during the first years.

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<sup>28</sup> Figures slightly vary according to other data sources, for instance from the Gender generation Survey (see above).

<sup>29</sup> The survey “Etude des relations familiales et intergénérationnelles- ERFI” carried out by the INED and the INSEE is the French version of the international “Generations and Gender Survey”- GGS-. The first wave of the ERFI survey was carried out in 2005 in France, the second wave in 2008. 10 000 adults (18-79) responded to the first wave, and 6500 of them have also responded to the second wave. This survey informs on opinions and attitudes towards changes in family structure, parenthood and family styles. Here, we use data from the first wave survey.

<sup>30</sup> This possibility was legally introduced in 2002 (Law of the 14 March 2002)

For Stefan this is woman's job. Inge's husband shares the same point of view. This belief is not so common in France where there is a longstanding tradition of outsourcing childcare. The effect of these norms regarding the child well-being is reflected in the mothers' employment patterns as also in the conflicting identities between working and mothering (Gerhart, 2005). Irrespective to the number of children or to the age of the last child, French mothers display higher employment rates than mothers in Germany though the gap has been reduced from the 1990s. But German mothers (West German) also work part-time more often than mothers in France. As Fagnani and Math (2010) underlined it, the reform of the *Elterngeld* in Germany was driven by the assumption according to which it is better for a child to be cared for by the parents/mothers at home until the age of one, whereas in France it is socially admitted that children may be cared for by childminder or in a collective structure as soon as the maternity leave ends, that is when the child is three months old. Such a decision would not be well accepted in West Germany where prevailing norms about children education and care are still common even among the young generation.

### **Attitudes towards mothers' employment**

Mothers' work is still controversial in France, notably among the older generations as shown by the responses to the ERFI survey (see note 27). Despite the fact that women have been increasingly participating in the labour force over the last 50 years, one respondent on four state that in a context of economic recession, men should be given priority in access to employment. Women are however more than men opposed to this statement (64% and 58% respectively disagree on it). It is however on this issue that wide variations between age cohorts are found: only 10% of the 20-24 years support such a priority to men against 50% of the 75-79 years old, therefore reflecting deep change in attitudes towards women's work.

Mothers with young children are also participating more than before in the labour force. In 2009, 78% of mothers with at least one child under three years old were working against 43% in 1975. Nevertheless, more than 50% of the respondents state that a "young child may suffer from mothers' work" (53% of men and 49% of women). But 69% of the stay-at-home mothers share this opinion, as also 66% of the low educated respondents and 65% of immigrant respondents. Once again, opinions highly vary according to the age of the respondents: under 40 years old, only four on ten of the respondents under forty years of age "agree" with a possible risk of suffering for children from working mothers against seven on ten for the 65 years and older (Mainguené, 2011).

According to Régis Bigot and Patricia Crouette, (Bigot and Crouette, 2010), traditionalism in regard to life styles is going backward. According to these authors commenting the 2010 CREDOC survey results, "Changes are resulting from a long term trend towards traditional attitudes: attitude towards marriage as being an indissoluble union has losing ground during the last 30 years, as also attitude towards mothers' participation in employment. For instance, in the early 1980s, only 28% of people living in rural areas advocated the idea that women "should be able to work in all cases when they want it" whereas 30 years later 62% of the same population agree on this statement, thereby reducing the gap in attitudes between rural and urban population. Nowadays, 70% of the urban respondents agree on the statement according to which women should work if they want to do so. Meanwhile, the value attributed to the family (*la valeur famille*) that remains very high on the value ladder in France is less hegemonic than before. For instance, in the 1970 onwards, 68% of the respondents supported the statement according to which "the family is the only place in which one feels well and comfortable", they are 59% in 2010 (Bigot and Crouette, 2010).

Over 30 years, attitudes towards women's work have been considerably changing in France: nowadays, 71% of the respondents assume that women should do (work) whatever they want (30%

supported this idea in the early 1980s). Only 12% assume that mothers with young children should not work (they were 41% thirty years ago).

### **Attitudes towards childrearing**

Norms shaping attitudes towards childrearing and parenthood also shape reproductive decisions (Salles et al., 2010). According to some authors (notably Mills *and al.*, 2008) women limit their fertility intentions when partners do not share housework or parental duties. But interviews show that this is not always the case since it is more men than women who want to limit the number of children, especially in Germany.

The issue however is that a gendered division of work is not necessarily perceived as unfair but rather may be accepted if suiting to abilities and preferences with respect to parenting (Rossier and Bernardi, 2009). It is however noticeable that in the French sample, all French respondents, men and women, value women's involvement into the labour force, therefore depreciating the "housewife" status. This attitude towards the stay-at-home mothers is common in France among the young generations of parents. It is often formulated in the following terms (Patricia, female, 30, cohabiting, one child):

*"For my own sake, I needed to work. Financially, it makes a difference too, but indeed it is mainly my choice. Staying at home was impossible. Already by the end of three months [of maternity leave] ... I just had to go out. I am not made to staying at home".*

In the middle class that characterizes our sample of interviews, active fathering is also valued both by women and men. Taking care of children is rewarding for both parents, and no father complains about sharing parental duties.

In West Germany where women usually stop working after childbirth, all respondents whatever their ultimate goals in terms of occupational or family commitments, advocate the mother taking at least one year maternity/parental leave to be followed by a return to work part-time (often for few hours a week). Full time work is only envisaged later once children are grown up (Salles et al., 2010:12). In the West German sample, most mothers who are not on parental leave are working part-time with few working hours so to be as much as possible at home with children. Caring for children is seen as a mother's responsibility. Most respondents would not like the idea of fathers taking up parental leave:

*"I think I am very old- fashioned in that respect. I don't think there will ever be a question of that [father's leave] for us. Even at the beginning he found it hard to accept that I earn more than him. (...) He still has not completely accepted it. So, I think there is no question of that for us. He could just as well breast feed the baby." (Paula)*

As Salles *et al.* (2010) put it, "the idea that somebody other than the mother could take the parental leave never even crossed some respondents' mind" (p. 12). The gender division of tasks is often justified by biological arguments that determine the gender specialisation in working and mothering. Although women are participating more in the labour force, the male breadwinner ideology is still running, and the "new fathers" that we have seen in the French sample remain an exception on the West German side (and by necessity rather than by choice).

## **Conclusion**

### **Implications of youth labour market uncertainties on fertility decisions – France and Germany compared.**

Transitions to adulthood are occurring later in the life course due to longer time spent in education, labour market uncertainties and longer periods spent living in a couple without children. Accordingly, family formation is occurring later. Economic insecurity resulting from labour market uncertainties has become a common problem for young people in most European countries, though with various implications, notably with respect to the age of emancipation from parental support for housing, income and family formation.

Although their education and training systems are very different, France and Germany are both concerned by high labour market uncertainty for young people. However, despite higher male and female unemployment rates in France, the overall fertility level is substantially higher than in Germany. While there is no clear evidence from the literature about the implications of work uncertainties on family formation and fertility decisions, a qualitative survey carried out in the two countries shows that the implications vary according to class, gender and institutional context.

Similar trends are observed in the two countries with respect to postponement of childbearing, reduction of family size and increased childlessness despite progress in assisted reproductive technologies. The two countries differ, however, on two points at least: a higher proportion of childless men and women in Germany, especially among the higher educated, and different patterns regarding family size, with a stronger tendency to have only one child in Germany while the norm is around two children in France.

This report explores to what extent labour market uncertainties at the age of family formation contribute to variations in fertility patterns between the two countries. It draws on a review of the literature backed by an analysis of a set of interviews carried out with a similar sample of respondents in the two countries and using the same set of questions. The analysis emphasizes the impact of policies and institutional frameworks on fertility decisions, and the role of values and social norms regarding gender roles in parental responsibilities, as well as child well-being and education.

All in all, both the macro-economic data and the qualitative survey conducted in France and Germany reveal remarkable differences in the way that economic insecurity affects fertility intentions and realizations in the two countries. Despite high youth unemployment and a depressed economic climate in recent years, fertility in France is among the highest in Europe. By contrast, while the crisis in Germany was short-lived, and its youth unemployment rate is much lower than that of France, its total fertility rate is well below that of France and most other countries of Europe. Likewise, the interviews clearly show that an insecure occupational and financial situation has only a limited impact on fertility intentions and realizations in France, while these reasons are often given by the German respondents to justify a small desired family size, especially among respondents who already have a child.

One of the observed differences between the two countries concerns the much more chaotic trajectories towards stable employment in Germany than in France. This clearly plays a role in the impact of economic insecurity on fertility decisions. The transition from end of schooling to first stable job is much longer in Germany, due notably to career changes or education "gap years". For example, some respondents opted for a gap year before beginning a training course, some abandoned one training course to take up another, and some resigned from their job to return to education and improve their level of qualification. In fact, although aged around 30, many of the German

respondents were still students. This is much less frequently the case in France. It is true that German students obtain their first degree very late, at age 27.5 years on average,<sup>31</sup> and this also applies for technical qualifications. After obtaining their high school diploma, students often decide to switch between tracks to obtain technical or vocational qualifications, resulting in more years spent in education. Many of the German respondents had taken this option. There is no doubt that the precarious family situation of many of the German respondents has a negative impact on fertility realizations, its first consequence being a postponement of family formation. For the German respondents, the decision to delay childbearing is explained above all by their desire to establish a secure financial and occupational situation before having a child, whose perceived cost is high, especially in a context where aspirations for personal well-being are also high. This postponement is also explained by the German respondents' demanding requirements with respect to the child's upbringing. They believe that they must be able to offer a high standard of living to the child, and that neither the child nor themselves should be obliged to make sacrifices. This strong aspiration to be capable of satisfying all the child's wishes, combined with a sometimes precarious financial situation, also provides a clear explanation for the desire of many Germany respondents to limit their family size.

In other words, the stronger impact of economic insecurity on fertility intentions and realizations in Germany is explained by both cultural and institutional factors and notably by high expectations on the part of the mother and a strong desire to be capable of satisfying the child's every need. In Germany, it is difficult to reconcile work and family life, and children are cared for primarily by their parents, thereby restricting mothers' career opportunities. Levels of financial support and tax breaks are much lower than in France, so a birth has a high cost for parents. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that having a child is seen as a life-changing event in Germany – but much less so in France.

The comparison between France and Germany reveals the influence of the institutional and cultural framework on fertility decisions. It also highlights the differing impact of economic insecurity on family formation. The differences observed between the two countries centre around several factors, all of which are linked to the political and socio-cultural context.

First, the gender dimension is much stronger in Germany than in France: men are the main breadwinners. An insufficient income on the part of the male partner is a major obstacle to fertility realization. This is less the case in France, where it is the couple's joint income that counts. This breadwinner status certainly explains why it is above all men in Germany who want to limit family size, rather than women. Here again, the situation is different in France. This gender dimension can be explained by two main factors. First, it reflects the idea, still strongly anchored in Germany culture, that the mother is the main responsible for the child. Second, it arises from the limited provision of external preschool childcare and short school opening hours which oblige one of the parents – generally the mother – to limit her working hours to look after the child. In France, the public authorities take the place of the parents in the daytime by offering extensive childcare provision and keeping children in school during working hours.

It is clear that the impact of economic insecurity is higher if the financial burden of a child is placed principally on the shoulders of just one person, the father. It is not surprising, therefore, that the family and employment situations weigh more heavily on fertility decisions in Germany than in France.

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<sup>31</sup> Figure for 2008. Statistisches Bundesamt, *Hochschulen auf einen Blick*, 2010. Age at which a degree corresponding to 4 years in higher education is obtained. It is slightly higher for a Master's degree.



Second, we note that socioeconomic status has a larger impact in Germany. While the working classes tend to have more children despite a lower income, the middle and higher social groups tend to limit their family size. Although this is also partly true in France, the impact is smaller. The difference between the two countries is also explained to a certain extent by their institutional frameworks. Given that women are expected to give up any career ambitions when they have children, and that it is more difficult to reconcile work and family life in Germany, the opportunity cost of children is very high. Many women in the higher social groups therefore remain childless so that they can pursue a career. Thanks to government support, there is less conflict between work and family in France than in Germany, enabling many women, even highly qualified ones, to combine a career and a family.

The low perceived level of government support explains why Germans rely more strongly on their families. Some respondents said that if there is enough family support, it is still possible to have a child, while others, without such support, find themselves in a very difficult situation. More so than in France, the impact of financial situation depends on the level of family support available to respondents.

Last, we observe a fundamental difference in the transitions to first and second child. The German respondents do not give the same reasons for choosing to have no children or just one. Those who want to remain childless do not use financial or professional arguments to justify their position, but their desire to remain free, to not burden themselves with a child who represents a major investment in time and money. By contrast, for respondents who plan to have just one child – or who have given up the idea of a second child, albeit with regret – financial and professional reasons provide the main justification for their choice. In both cases, however, the respondents plan to limit their family size or remain childless because the child is perceived as an obstacle to their freedom. This attitude can be largely explained by the strong constraints imposed upon parents. They are almost solely responsible for caring for the child throughout its childhood, including years in school, and financial support (notably tax breaks) is less generous than in France. The financial impact of a birth is more limited for French respondents, their main concern being to obtain a satisfactory childcare solution.

These three major differences reveal the decisive impact of the institutional and cultural framework, not only on the occupational and financial situation of families, but also on the production of social norms and, in turn, on fertility and family formation decisions. So the implications of labour market uncertainty on family formation of the young people cannot be understood without keeping in mind the institutional and cultural differences between the two countries.

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## VIII-Annexe 1

**Table 1: Employment features of mothers with young children, France and Germany:**

	Germany	France	UE 27
	2007	2007	2007
Employment rate of mothers with a child less than 6	56.6	62.1	62.3
Employment rate of fathers with a child less than 6	89.7	90.3	89.8
Gender wage gap (%)	22.0	11.0	15.0
% women working part-time	45.8	30.2	31.2
% men working part-time	9.4	5.7	7.7
Average weekly working hours :			
• Women	30.2	34.6	33.9
• men	40.0	41.2	41.1

Source : Eurostat 2009 (Demography Report 2008)

**Table 2: General indicators, Germany and France**

	Germany	France
<b>Part-time employment rate : mothers with children 0-5</b>	<b>46.2</b>	<b>22.2</b>
Part-time employment rate: mothers with children 6-14	59.3	27.9
Fertility rate ( Women 14-49)	1.4	2.1
Proportion of childless women (%)	30.0	10.0
Mean age at first birth	29.8	28.6
Proportion of birth out of wedlock	30.0	50.4
Gender wage gap	23.2	19.2
Proportion of women among professionals	27.0	36.6
% of children 0-2 in formal childcare structures	9.0	28.0
% of children 3-6 in formal childcare structures or education	78.0	99.0

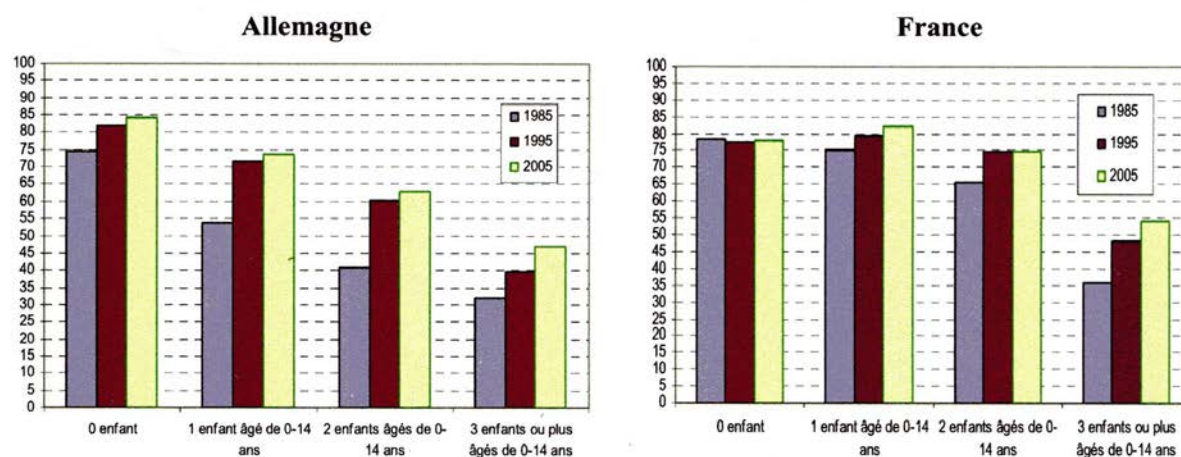
**Table 3: Proportion of young people living in couple, France**

	1982	1990	1998	2006
<b>Total population (%)</b>	48.8	48.7	48.2	47.7
- men	49.9	50.0	49.7	49.3
- women	47.6	47.4	46.9	46.2
<b>By age group (% of the population +15)</b>	<b>62.5</b>	<b>61.0</b>	<b>59.5</b>	<b>58.4</b>
<b>Men (15 and +)</b>	<b>64.9</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>62.0</b>	<b>61.1</b>
- 15-19	1	1	1	1
- 20-24	29	20	15	16
- 25-29	71	59	50	48
- 30-35	81	75	69	67
<b>Women (15 and +)</b>	<b>60.2</b>	<b>58.8</b>	<b>57.2</b>	<b>55.9</b>
- 15-19	6	3	3	3
- 20-24	55	40	31	31
- 25-29	80	72	64	62
- 30-35	74	80	74	73
<b>Number of people in couple (in thousands)</b>	20 464	27 578	28 224	29 288
<b>% of married couples /all couples</b>	93.8	87.5	82.2	78.0

*Field:* Metropolitan France

*Source:* Insee, recensements de la population (Daguet et Niel, 2010)

**Chart 1: Women's activity rates by number of children, Germany and France, 1985, 1995, 2005 (women 20-49)**

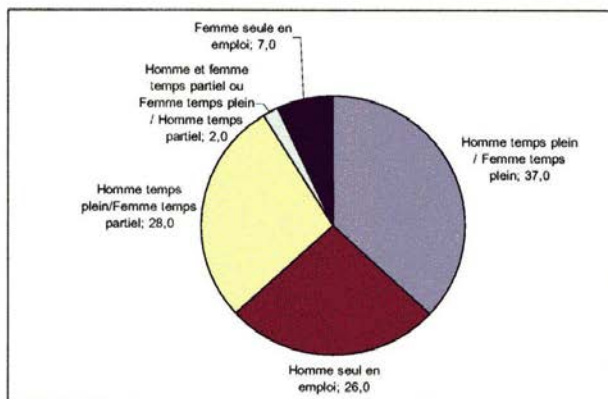


*Source :* Eurostat

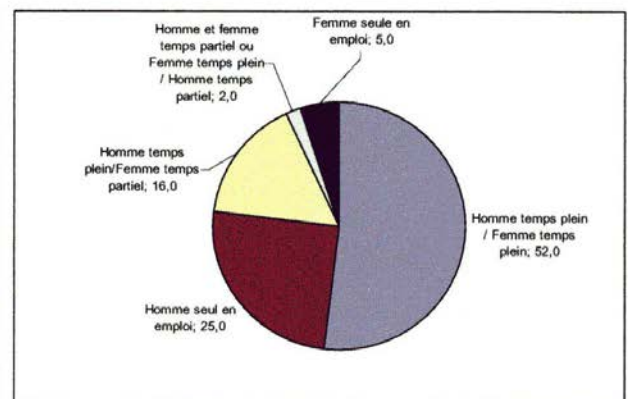
**Chart 2 : Organizational arrangements of couples 20-49 years of whom at least one member participates in the labour market, Germany and France.**



## Allemagne



## France



Source : Eurostat, extrait de « Conciliation entre vie professionnelle et vie familiale : des écarts entre les femmes et les hommes », C. Aliaga, 2005, Statistiques en Bref, n°4.

## Annex 2: Data and methods

### *Two comparable set of in-depth interviews in France and Germany*

To study individual representations of work and family, and their relation to fertility intentions and outcomes in two different family policy contexts, we used data from a comparable qualitative study conducted by the Max Planck Institute of Rostock (Germany) and by the Institut National d'Etudes Démographiques (INED, France) on the determinants of entry into parenthood. The data comprise 62 semi-structured interviews, of which 35 were conducted in 2004-05 with people who grew up in a Western German town (Lübeck), and 27 were conducted in 2006-07 with people who grew up in a French town (Poitiers). The respondents are between 28 and 37 years of age at the time of the interview, which are the peak childbearing years in both countries. The sample includes both men and women, and people with and without children.

Both Lübeck and Poitiers are university towns of comparable size close to large city centres (Hamburg for Lübeck, and Paris for Poitiers). The persons selected for the interview all attended high school in these towns. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the impact of social network interactions on fertility decisions: respondents were chosen from among people who went to the same high schools to control for primary socialization, an issue which is important when studying secondary socialization (i.e. social influence in social networks) (Bernardi, Keim, and Von der Lippe 2007). Only people still living in or around the two towns or close by (in Hamburg or Paris) were selected. Respondents were contacted via Internet sites of alumni or via the snowball technique (contacts obtained from prior respondents). The method of sample selection focused mainly on the middle class, especially in the Western German sample. The respondents' educational level is comparable in both data sets, ranging from medium to high. However, in the French sample, we made an effort to add some individuals without a high school diploma, and we interviewed in Paris the most career oriented individuals among those who grew up in Poitiers. Hamburg on the other hand is not the main centre of attraction for the highly qualified and ambitious young people from Lübeck, who have a tendency to move to the cities in the South of Germany, so the German sample contains few career oriented individuals.

The interviews were semi-structured, and respondents were asked to express themselves on the following issues: professional, residential, marital and reproductive history, quality of the conjugal relation and future projects (if any), family background and current social network, representations of gender roles and division of tasks within the couple, representations of the meaning of children and of the conditions for having children, evolution of fertility intentions over the life cycle, knowledge about different childcare options and effective childcare arrangements (on this point the French interview guide was adapted to the French context), fertility behaviours and representations in respondents' social networks, and finally, perceptions of their future. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and names have been changed.

#### *Analysis*

All French and Western German interviews were encoded on the computer program Nvivo 7, using a thematic classification. This encoding prepared the content of the interview for theme-by-theme analysis, and allowed analysts to go back rapidly to certain sections of the interviews or quotes. Each French and Western German interview was summarized in a "portrait" based on a thematic grid (childhood, occupational history, marital history, fertility intentions and outcomes, child care: attitudes and practices, current social network, gender relations, exchanges in social network about childbearing and rearing), and the portraits were illustrated by quotes.

For this analysis, we added ten interviews of partners in Germany, three women and seven men. Two of them are in couple, but they both plan to marry, and the other eight couples are married.

**Table : The French and the Western German samples**

	<b>POITIERS (FRANCE)</b>	<b>LÜBECK (WESTERN GERMANY)</b>
<b>TOTAL SAMPLE</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>35</b>
Men	12	15
Women	14	20
<b>PARITY</b>		
Childless	13	24
One child	6	9
Two children	7	2
Three children	1	0
<b>EDUCATIONAL LEVEL</b>		
Low	2	0
Medium	13	12
High	12	23
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>		
Married	7	14
Cohabiting	8	6
Single	11	14
Engaged	0	1
Divorced/separated	1	0

### **Age, marital status, number of children and occupational status of the Western German respondents**

Amelie, 32, single, childless, educator, jobless
Anja, 29, LAT <sup>32</sup> , childless, senior clerk human resources
Arno, 30, LAT, childless, journalist
Bärbel, 31, married, two children, training course (naturopath)
Britta, 29, married, one child, physiotherapist (in training course), & Wolfgang, 34, Business Administration and Engineering
Christin, 30, in couple, childless, psychologist, & Sven, 34, academic researcher
Claudia, 33, married, childless, student, & Klaus, 29, student
Franziska, 29, married, one child, teacher & Jens, 30, advocate and parental leave
Inge, 39, married, one child, at home, biologist, & Werner, 34, chairman
Jan, 30, single, childless, call center agent and student
Jürgen, 31, single, childless, security adviser
Julia, 34, single, childless, dental hygienist
Kathrin, 29, in couple, childless, studied business economics, clerk
Lars, 27, single, childless, dairy expert
Maike, 31, in couple, childless, student, & Jochen, 31, insurance agent
Markus, 28, married, one child, bank clerk, & Tanja, 29, nurse
Martin, 29, LAT (engaged), childless, technical sales representatives

<sup>32</sup> LAT: Living Apart Together is a term for couples who, whilst committed to each other, are living in separate homes.

Martina, 30, LAT, childless, restoring furniture
Matthias, 29, married, childless, portfolio manager, & Dorothea, 27, student
Melanie, 33, married, one child, postwoman, part time
Nadia, 31, LAT, childless, white collar worker
Nina, 30, in couple, childless, student
Ozan, 28, married, one child, technical sales representatives (wife at home)
Paul, 31, married, childless, student
Paula, 31, in couple, childless, administrative clerk
Petra, 29, married, one child, at home, insurance agent, & Michael, 34, insurance agent
Ralf, 28, single, childless, student
Stefan, 31, LAT, childless, student
Susanne, 30, LAT, childless, insurance agent
Thomas, 31, married, childless, white collar worker
Tilman, 37, married, one child, commercial agent, & Lisa, 36, parental leave
Tobias, 31, married, two children, employee in a public service (wife at home)
Ulla, 29, in couple, pregnant, manager
Ulrich, 29, single, childless, student
Wiebke, 29, LAT, childless, veterinarian assistant

## Age, marital status, number of children and professional status of the French respondents

Alice, 27, LAT, childless, translator
Amandine, 28, married, one child, white collar worker in an pharmaceutical laboratory
Anne-Sophie, 28, cohabiting, two children, on parental leave, no employment
Ariane, 30, single, childless, customer manager
Benoît, 27, LAT, childless, actor
Camille, 29, married, two children, teacher
Damien, 30, married, two children, fireman
David, 30, single, childless, teacher
Dominique, 29, in (homosexual) couple, one child, marketing assistant
Elise, 28, LAT, childless, white collar worker in clinical research
Eric, 32, married, two children, fireman
Etienne, 31, married, two children, commercial
Fabien, 28, single, childless, nurse
Franck, 29, single, childless, fiscal agent
Hélène, 30, single, childless, psychiatric nurse
Jérémy, 28, cohabiting, childless, chemist, looking for a job
Justine, 30, LAT, childless, commercial assistant
Karine, 29, cohabiting, childless, customer manager
Marie, 29, cohabiting, one child, policewoman
Patrick, 27, single, childless, student
Sammy 33, cohabiting, two children, computer manager in an association
Sandrine, 30, cohabiting, one child, accountant
Sofia, 29, cohabiting, one child, temporary part-time work in an association
Sylvain, 31, married, three children, joiner
Sylvie, 28, LAT, childless, management assistant
Thierry, 32, married, one child, engineer in an architect office
Valentine, 28, separated, one child, manager in the building trade

## Annexe 3

## Evidence of labour market uncertainty for young people four years after leaving the education system in 2004, France (source: Cereq)

According to the Cereq survey, three years after leaving the education system in 2004, 13% of the school leavers were unemployed, 4% had returned in education, 3% were on training and 3% were neither working, nor unemployed, nor in education. Finally, 77% were employed, but only 58% of the young with no diploma compared to about 90% with a high degree (Joseph *et al.* 2008).

Four years after finishing school, 33% of the employed had a short-term contract but 51% of those with no diploma and about 25% of those with a high degree (except those who came from “grandes écoles” who were not concerned).

On average 13% of the employed were working part-time four years after leaving school. The proportion is between 14 and 19% for the low educated compared to less than 10% for the high educated (but only 1% for the young from “grandes écoles”). Around 12% of the low educated are working involuntarily part-time compared to about 5% for the high educated.

The median salary was around 1300 euros per month (net) but varying from 1200 euros for the low educated to around 1500-1800 euros for the high educated.

Nevertheless, three years after leaving school, unemployment is higher for women than for men with similar level of education and is higher among low educated women than on the high educated. In addition, at all education levels, men's salary is higher than women's salary., therefore showing a discrimination effect. At all levels of education, women are more often than their male counterparts concerned by involuntary part-time work and with a higher incidence on low educated women.

### *Impact of parenthood on early career for women and men*

During the first years of working life, there are negotiations within couples on both gender roles and working patterns. Young women tend to leave parental home earlier than their male counterparts. They also tend to have children earlier than young men. According to the Cereq study (Couppié and Epiphane, 2007), only half of young women still live with their parents when they leave school compared to more than two men on three. Seven years later, the gender gap is still there:  $\frac{3}{4}$  of young women live in couple compared to  $\frac{1}{2}$  of men. And about  $\frac{1}{4}$  of men and more than  $\frac{1}{2}$  women have at least one child. The gap is particularly large for the low educated young people (who are also those who leave earlier the education system). Nevertheless, despite the reducing impact of children on female labour force participation, becoming a mother results in difficulties in accessing to the work force during the transition period from education to employment.

So, becoming a mother change the occupational profile of many young women whereas becoming a father has little impact on the occupational profile of men: 91% of the male respondents to the Cereq survey do not mention any change in their occupational situation after their first child and 96% mention no change after the second birth (Couppié and Epiphane, 2007). By contrast, the occupational situation of women change after the arrival of children: 20% of young women with several children are not in the labour force seven years after school leaving, 10% are unemployed compared to 3% and 8% respectively for women with no children. The proportion differ according to the level of education: the proportion of mothers outside the labour force varies from 11% for the high educated to 41% for women with no diploma at all. In addition, childless women are more often than other women with children employed full time.

When surveyed by the Cereq on the incidence of the first birth on their working life, 32% of women respondents and 10% of men say that it has an incidence on their work pattern. So, after their first child, 17% of women shifted to part-time work, 11% changed their job, 7% resigned work and 4% took a full time parental leave. The shift to part-time work is even more frequent after the second birth as also the take up of a parental leave: 35% reduced their working hours while 16% went on parental leave. Finally, 49% said that their working life changed

after becoming a mother. But the tradeoff between work and care at the detriment of work is risky with regard to an eventual breaking of the couple. Actually, after seven years of working life, 30% of divorced or separated mothers are none employed and only 54% are employed full time (Couppié and Epiphane, 2007).

*The impact of the economic recession on transitions to work*

Young men and women who finished education in 2004 have entered into the labour force during the economic recession period. The Cereq survey shows that the economic crises had a higher impact on low educated young people than on others. They have more difficulties in access to a job. They are also more often unemployed than others who have a higher skilled level. In addition, because of difficulties in access to a job or to a quality job, part of young people with a secondary level of education tends to return on training. By contrast, high educated young men and women access more rapidly to the labour market, but it takes longer for women than for men (Joseph *et al.*, 2008).